

# La Revolución Sigue Adelante

## Cuban State Discourse in *Granma* in the 'Special Period' and the post-Castro Era.

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# LA REVOLUCION SIGUE ADELANTE: CUBAN STATE DISCOURSE IN *GRANMA* IN THE ‘SPECIAL PERIOD’ AND THE POST-CASTRO ERA.

## ABSTRACT

On 11 July 2021 some thousand protesters hit the streets around Cuba. The protests were triggered by food and medicine shortages and by discontent with how the government handled the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the largest protest since Cuba’s 1959 Revolution but not the only one, as in 1994 some hundred protesters took to the street in Cuba’s Capital Havana to demand the possibility to leave the country. These two protests were the result of more widely felt popular dissatisfaction in two periods of crisis: the ‘Special Period’ (1991-1999) and the post-Castro era (2018-present). This thesis analyses the discourse of the Cuban state in its official newspaper *Granma* and asks how the Cuban state has legitimised its power discursively in these periods of crisis.

This research is theoretically underlined by the idea that (state) power is inherently unstable and always needs to legitimise itself to function and maintain itself. In periods of crisis there is a greater need for legitimacy. By comparing the two periods, this research finds that there is little difference in the content of the state discourse. The same legitimising claims are present in both periods. The main legitimising claims are the emphasis on the achievements of the Cuban revolution – therefore of socialism – and the emphasis on the US and the US embargo as the cause of economic problems in Cuba. Partly corresponding with these claims, this thesis analyses the Cuban state discourse surrounding five extracted dominant themes: Fidel Castro, the mobilisation of history, the United States and its embargo, the achievements of the revolution and protest/dissidence.

This research concludes that contrary to the similarities in the content of the discourse in the two periods, there are fundamental differences in the tone and form of the discourse between the two periods. The tone of the discourse is more aggressive, bitter, negative, and insecure the post-Castro era. An example of the aggressive tone in the post-Castro era is that the US embargo is described as ‘genocidal’ in this period. When it comes

to form, there is an increase in legitimising claims in the post-Castro era: more articles are attributed to legitimise aspects of the state's project instead on reporting on events. It appears that the state is in more need of legitimisation. This change in tone and form of the discourse in the post-Castro era is described with the introduced concept of 'overlegitimisation', in this case defined as *the state feels contested by the growing emergence of alternative discourses. To counter this, the state is clinging desperately to its older discourse, and is trying to push this through more forcefully, for example by using more aggressive and argumentative language and by the endless repetition of legitimising claims*. This research further explores the social context of the analysed periods and finds that, in the post-Castro era, there is a growing discrepancy between the discursive content of legitimising claims and the social context wherein they gain their meaning. Ultimately, this thesis explores theory on the effect of alternative discourses on dominant discourses. Next to the primary source *Granma* itself, there is also evidence found in theory for the concept of 'overlegitimisation'.

**KEYWORDS:** *Cuba, Granma, Power, State Power, Discourse, Alternative Discourses, Legitimisation, Overlegitimisation, Crisis, Protest.*

## Preface

In September 2018, not long after I had moved to Cuba's capital Havana for an indefinite period to study Spanish at the University of Havana and start a business in tourism, my interest in Cuban state discourse and its truths was piqued. Over the first few months of my stay in Havana, I went to lunch at the same lunch cafe regularly and practised my Spanish by reading and translating the daily newspaper *Granma*. On one of these days, after translating an article located on the last page, I was surprised by its remarkable message, which was that the situation in North Korea is not as bad as the neo-liberal western media would have you believe; North Korea is doing quite well. I marvelled at the extent to which these truths can differ between different discourses. I wondered why the Cuban state apparently felt the need to write this, I wondered if the Cuban people would subscribe to this 'truth' or criticise it. Out of an interest in keeping up with current events and the political situation in Cuba, as well as to perfect my Spanish, I decided to take out a subscription to the Cuban state newspaper.

At that moment the seed of this research into Cuban state discourse was planted, as I started to read the Cuban state newspaper daily and found many other 'truths' that are contrary to the western discourses, one of which was that the Cuban Communist Party is the sole guarantor of democracy in Cuba. Besides finding these conflicting discourses, I started to become increasingly interested in how power is legitimised through discourse and thus in theories of state power. When major protests erupted in Havana in 2021, when I was already back in the Netherlands, questions of the Cuban state's legitimacy arose. From it, I decided that I wanted to do further research into this recent period after the Castro presidency and compare it to a crisis period in the 1990s when another protest took place in Havana. This all has now resulted into this master's thesis.

The big inspiration and motivation for this thesis has been my daughter Nirvana. I want to thank her especially for taking long naps in the afternoon so I could use this time to do my research and write this thesis. How well the Cuban revolution fares interests me mainly because of her, as she will hopefully be able to return to her country of birth in the future in a stable environment with less socioeconomic issues than now.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On 11 July 2021 thousands of Cubans took to the streets in one of the first massive protests<sup>1</sup> since its 1959 Revolution<sup>2</sup>. According to observers and protesters, they were triggered by a shortage of food and medicine and by discontent with how the authoritarian government handled the COVID-19 pandemic. The protests were not organised but started by a handful of people in a small village just outside of the capital Havana<sup>3</sup>; a real grassroots protest. By using social media, the protests were able to ‘spread’ to other cities around the island. Already since 2018, when Raúl Castro stepped down as president, meaning an official end to the Castro era, there has been an increasing social dissatisfaction with Cuban’s current economic policies and its uncertain future.

The 2021 protests were the largest protests in Cuba since its 1959 Revolution when solely looking at the numbers of protesters. However, there have been other periods of instability and protests<sup>4</sup> that might have been just as significant as the 2021 protests. For example, social unrest also manifested itself in Cuba during the 1990’s, a period that has come to be known as the ‘special period’. After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba lost its ideological ally and stopped receiving its financial support. It resulted in a sincere economic and humanitarian crisis and a protest known as ‘El Maleconazo’ in 1994, where some hundred protesters took to the street in Cuba’s Capital Havana, mainly demanding to be able to leave the country. Fidel Castro’s change of emigration laws as a reaction, resulted in a mass exodus of Cubans overseas to Florida.

How the Cuban state itself has interpreted the protests and crises, how it has positioned itself in these periods of social unrest, and how it has responded to them discursively has been given little attention to but will be at the centre of this research. Which position the Cuban state took and how it discursively legitimised that position are questions that I will try to answer in this thesis by analysing the discourse of the Cuban

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: José Carlos Cueto, “Protestas En Cuba: Qué Fue El Histórico “Maleconazo” De 1994 Y Cómo Se Compara Con Las Masivas Movilizaciones De Este Domingo,” *BBC News Mundo*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-57805495>.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis, ‘Revolution’ refers to the historical events in 1956-1959 and ‘revolution’ to the system and more complex process since 1959 of building a socialist state.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco López Segrera, “Cuba: The July 11, 2021, Protests,” *Latin American Perspectives* 48, no. 6 (September 2021): 37-38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X211044094>.

<sup>4</sup> López, “Cuba”, 37-38.

state in its official state newspaper 'Granma' during the two main periods of social and economic distress in Cuba's recent history, those being the 'special period' (1991-1999) and the post-Castro Era (2018-present).

### **1.1. Research Question**

Analysing the discourse of the Cuban state in two different and in time divided periods of social upheaval and economic crisis, hopefully shows us either clear similarities or differences (or both) between the two periods. A difference in the social context of the two periods is the rise of social media and internet access in the post-Castro era, which might have caused shifts in the way the Cuban state legitimises itself. The main question to be answered in this research is: *How has the Cuban state legitimised its power discursively through its official newspaper Granma in two periods of crisis: the 'special period' (1991-1999) and the post-Castro era (2018-present)?*

(State) power, discourse and legitimisation are central concepts in this research. The definitions of these concepts constitute a major part of the theoretical framework of this thesis. The research is underlined by the idea that power always needs to be legitimised to function and maintain itself. This process of legitimisation takes place through political discourse and normally works by the repetition of claims within that discourse that justify the existing power in place, its history, its behaviour, and its political project. This state's search for approval is motivated to maintain power. Intuitively, in times of economic and social distress, there is more necessity to legitimise its project, i.e., then a power is more likely to be contested.

To be able to answer the main research question, I have formulated three sub research questions: (1) Which legitimising discourses can be identified in the Cuban state newspaper Granma during the 'special period' and the post-Castro era? (2) Which discursive continuities and changes (similarities and differences) can be identified between the two time periods? (3) In what social context is the discourse formed and what does the underlying social context tell us about the legitimising discourse? I believe these 3 sub questions to be relevant and sufficient for answering the main research question, because together they capture the content, tone, form of the discourse, but they also put discourse in relation to its social context.

## 1.2 Literature Review

There is not much research conducted yet on Cuban state discourse, especially not on its discourse in recent times. There is one research that does discuss the specific subject, which is the research by Lukas Port<sup>5</sup>. Chronologically and thematically my research builds up upon this research. Port analysed the Cuban state discourse surrounding two protests: one in 1980 and one in 1994. He concluded that the shifts in discourse between 1980 and 1994 were not fundamental nor significant. What makes my research innovative is that it is aimed at more recent development and events, namely protests that took place in Cuba in 2020 and 2021. There is not much written about it yet academically; not just because the events are recent, but also because it is a sensitive subject politically.

From within Cuba there is no academic research possible on for example the state's legitimising discourse. Vegard Bye even states that in Cuba there is no political science tradition at all: "...studying the Cuban political system represents some quite peculiar challenges. One of them concerns the lack of information; .... Another challenge concerns the nature of the Cuban discussion about political and economic issues; there is no native Political Science tradition that can provide this study with analytical terms and useful theories"<sup>6</sup>. A scientific debate on politics in Cuba is lacking and thus you should not expect to find a nuanced analysis of political issues in my primary source *Granma*. However, discourse analysis of Cuba's dominant source of information could show the 'meanings' ascribed to political concepts and changes, which is exactly the purpose of this research. The last innovative element is that my research is the first to systematically analyse discourse in *Granma* as the sole primary source in periods of social unrest.

The Cuban state and its discourse are interesting for multiple reasons. First, Cuba is one of the last 'standing' communist states, which could imply that its discourse holds other truths, morality, and ideology than many other states that are part of a globalised capitalist system. Second, there has been (or is) a lack of alternative discourses. Third, in close connection with the former, the Cuban state still owns all traditional media on the island: newspapers, television and radio. Fourth, recent and former events in Cuba make it

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<sup>5</sup> Lukas Port, "*Hegemonic Discourse and Sources of Legitimacy in Cuba: Comparing Mariel (1980) and The Maleconazo (1994)*" (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Vegard Bye, *Cuba, From Fidel to Raul and Beyond* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), 17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21806-5>.

worthwhile to study the state discourse in the periods of these events, best described as periods of (economic) crisis, social upheaval, or instability.

With the academic research available on them, I intended to cluster this literature review around two topics. The first is literature on the two periods of social distress and state legitimacy therein. The second is literature on Cuban state discourse and the availability of alternative discourses in general. I have structured this literature report accordingly, even though the clusters often overlap.

### **1.2.1. Periods of Social Distress and the Legitimacy of the State**

The post-Castro era (2018-present) brought forth some changes like loosening internet restrictions wherefor alternative discourses became more available, but there were also other types of reforms in the post-Castro era like more room for private entrepreneurship and private property. These policy changes seem to move away from strict socialism where the state is the sole economic actor. Vegard Bye is questioning if the Cuban state in the post-Castro era is really retreating as an economic actor<sup>7</sup>, as he does research on policy change under Raúl Castro (2008-2018) and analyses and how they are followed up by the new generation of leaders led by Miguel Díaz-Canel (2018-present). Bye also addresses the aspects of continuity of policy and identity over reform and change. Raúl Castro has proved over the last 10 years that the Cuban regime's continuity not only depended on the charismatic authority of Fidel Castro, and he has explicitly stated that his objective was to guarantee the continuation and irreversibility of socialism<sup>8</sup>. The same was said when Díaz-Canel took office in 2018.

At some points, Bye seems to make contradictory statements. On multiple occasions he speaks about *continuation* in the Raúl Castro era and on other occasions he lays out all the *reforms* implemented by Raúl. The author lacks to clarify this. Bye might mean that the continuation refers to the regime, the one-party system, the revolution and socialism and the reforms refer to economic (and social) reforms within socialism. I would even go further by supposing that the (historical) continuation of socialism (or the Revolution) is used in Cuban state discourse to legitimise economic reforms i.e., the state's project. An example of this is the slogan that was present in 2019 when the Cuban state

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<sup>7</sup> Bye, *Cuba*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1.

was 'campaigning' for the people to vote yes for the new constitution. Two of the slogans visible throughout Havana were "I vote yes"<sup>9</sup> and "yes to socialism"<sup>10</sup>, even though the economic reforms moved away from socialism, limiting the free education, and limiting subsidised food and other goods.

In the conclusion the availability of alternative discourses is also implicitly connected to political reform, when the author answers the question what relationship exists between economic reforms within a new international reality, and the prospects for political transformations in Cuba. In close connection, the main question answered is if there is a causal relationship between the economic reforms and political transformations in the form of political plurality. The potential for it has been confirmed in the post-Castro era. However, the potential is not realised, because the old-guard conservatives of the Cuban Communist Party reverse economic reforms that might undermine the political status quo<sup>11</sup> in fear of losing power.

After Raúl Castro stepped down in 2018, economic and institutional reforms became even more necessary, especially when Cuba saw a downturn of 11%<sup>12</sup> in its economy in 2020 due to the island closing to its main source of income: tourism. The socialist model that Cuba relied on, wherein the state economy would provide full employment, and everybody was expected to be able to lead a modest but dignified life on their salaries (if not through salaries, then through subsidising basic goods) – or if retired their pensions – was in distress already before the COVID-19 pandemic hit<sup>13</sup>. But it gained momentum during the pandemic, when the state failed to respond adequately to a halt to tourism and therefore a lack of income: "The challenges of economic reform and social policy, of effective governance and credible citizen participation all are on Cuba's public agenda simultaneously. They have been there for many years now, but the implementation of meaningful responses has been slow, piece-meal, or missing altogether"<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Yo voto sí".

<sup>10</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Sí por el socialismo".

<sup>11</sup> Bye, *Cuba*, 280.

<sup>12</sup> Talha Burki, "Behind Cuba's Successful Pandemic Response," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, April 1, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099\(21\)00159-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(21)00159-6).

<sup>13</sup> Bert Hoffmann, "Social Policies and Institutional Reform in Post-COVID Cuba: A Necessary Agenda." In *Social Policies and Institutional Reform in Post-COVID Cuba*, ed. by Bert Hoffmann (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2021), 7, <https://doi.org/10.3224/84742546.01>.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffmann, "Social Policies," 9.

Especially since Donald Trump tightened the embargo<sup>15</sup> against Cuba in 2019, preventing tourism from the US to the island as well as international cruise ships to arrive, it has been hard for the state to come with meaningful responses to economic problems that have an external next to domestic cause. Until today, the Cuban state has not been able to find a balance in acknowledging the possibility of putting its own house in order when it comes to the economy on the one hand and ascribing all the causes of the Cuban economic distress to the US embargo on the other. The inability in finding this balance must be weighed against the constant changing restrictions the US holds against Cuba.

Throughout the years the US embargo has been something that the Cuban state addresses repeatedly as the cause of the problems in the Cuban economy. This may have prevented a fruitful debate around the possibility of finding domestic solutions and forming domestic policies for domestic issues. Within the context of my research, addressing the US embargo as the sole cause of the Cuban economic situation can be seen as a ‘legitimising claim’, wherein the Cuban state justifies its existence and power by putting the accountability (for a crisis) outside of its influence. In the same way, it constructs and reaffirms a common enemy. This phenomenon is not new but has been present within Cuban state discourses since the 1959 Revolution.

The US embargo is often mentioned as an example of US imperialism. This is observed by Domínguez and Yaffe<sup>16</sup>, who claim that Cuban anti-imperialism sentiment has deep historical roots and has increased due to multiple events in the 1990s. Through the Torricelli act of 1992, that prevent other nations to trade with Cuba, and through the Helms-Burton Act of 1996<sup>17</sup>, that prevent foreign companies to trade with Cuba, the economic crisis and shortages worsened. They analyse that the US did this purposely with the goal for the Cuban state to fall. It is evident that it resulted in a deep economic crisis that brought a 35% contradiction of GDP<sup>18</sup> between 1989 and 1993: “The result was growing tension in Cuba’s political fabric; a function of increasing difficulties in the reproduction of legitimacy, ..., and the loss of referents for the socialist project”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> I will use the terms ‘embargo’ and ‘blockade’ throughout this thesis. They are interchangeable and refer to the same concept: the United States embargo against Cuba.

<sup>16</sup> Ernesto Domínguez López and Helen Yaffe, “The Deep, Historical Roots of Cuban Anti-imperialism,” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 11 (August 2017): 2525, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1374171>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Lukas Port concludes in his research on the Cuban state's legitimacy in the 1980s and 1990s that there were no significant problems in the process of the state's legitimisation in the 1990s<sup>20</sup>. He would thus disagree with Domínguez and Yaffe on the difficulties of the reproduction of legitimacy in the 1990s. But in line with Port<sup>21</sup>, Domínguez and Yaffe describe the 'special period' as a crisis wherein Cuba did not have to do concessions to their socialist ideology but did adapt their economic paradigm. For instance, Cuba tried to open to Foreign Direct Investment<sup>22</sup> (FDI) and to tourism. At the same time, they promoted their health care (by sending doctors abroad) and their biopharmaceutical industry. In this way they aimed on diversifying their economy. These, next to the aid of the new ally Venezuela and rising tourism, were the developments and policy changes that eventually led Cuba out of its crisis period in the late 1990s.

Though Port disagrees with Domínguez and Yaffe about the difficulties of the reproduction of legitimacy and the 1990's, both parties do agree that the project of socialism itself was not at stake yet in the special period. But now, in the post-Castro era the legitimacy of the Cuban state and with that the continuation of socialism do seem at stake as they are more contested in popular culture. The major protests in 2021 ultimately serve as evidence for this claim. Besides, there is a rise of alternative discourses through internet availability possibly contesting the state's truths.

In 2019, Tom G. Griffiths already foresaw what was yet to come as he states that "a perfect storm is brewing on the island, that is fuelled by shortages and blackouts like in the 1990s"<sup>23</sup>. The author realises that without the natural legitimacy of Fidel Castro, the Cuban state could not afford itself another protest like 'El Maleconazo' in 1994. Griffiths does see possibilities for the continuation of the project of socialism, which is his central argument. It would however be necessary "for the official media to change, in response to the social, political and material realities of the country, and as part of any efforts to engage with 'disconnected youth' and more openly confront and debate their realities"<sup>24</sup>.

In short, the author claims that there is a great need for change in the content and practice of the official Cuban media for it to play a meaningful role in the debate around

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<sup>20</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 157-158.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Domínguez & Yaffe, "Cuban Anti-imperialism," 2525.

<sup>23</sup> Tom G. Griffiths, "Socialism in Cuba: Debate and Socialist Renewal for the Twenty-First Century," *International Critical Thought* 9, no. 2 (June 2019): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Griffiths, "Socialism," 3.

the continuation of socialism<sup>25</sup>. The author continues by claiming that we are already seeing many signs of this change and adaption in the traditional media and that there is already a more open debate within Cuba that includes the official state media. I do however strongly doubt that there is any room for real debate on socialism in Cuba and in its main media outlets. My research also aims to find an answer to the question if this shift towards openness and debate is visible in the Cuban state discourse in *Granma*.

### **1.2.2 Cuban State Discourse and Alternative Discourses**

Since its 1959 Revolution, Cuba is run by its Communist Party (PCC) with Fidel Castro as its leader until 2008. Raúl Castro served as president until 2018, when Miguel Díaz-Canel took over. For the first time in 59 years, Cuba had a head of state that has not fought in the Revolution, which has presumably resulted in an identity crisis for the Cuban state and a loss of a source of legitimacy. In the beginning of the 1990's Cuba also experienced an apparent loss of legitimacy. Cuba lost the Soviet Union as its financial and ideological ally and with that the socialist block as an ideological point of reference and identity. This is observed by Lukas Port as he maps Cuba's history after the Revolution and constructs a theoretical framework for discourse analysis into Cuba's hegemonic discourse and forms of legitimacy. In his PhD dissertation, he studied what the similarities and differences are between the Cuban state discourse in two periods of protests: the Mariel Boatlift in 1980, a mass exodus of Cubans, and 'El Malezonazo', a protest of hundreds of Cubans on the Malecon, taking place in the context of an economic crisis after the collapse of the SU.

By comparing it shows that in the 1990's, due to a severe economic crisis, the legitimacy of the system "could not have been material, but instead resulted from social security, low crime, predictability, and patriotism, which were all promoted more than ever before"<sup>26</sup>. These may have contributed to the system's survival of the incredibly challenging times. In 1994, the discourse had to address the collapse of communism elsewhere, without causing harm to the legitimacy of the Cuban state: "The system was legitimated by a discourse that had been constructed by the revolutionary leaders, who successfully hegemonized the field of meaning, which appealed to Cubans ...".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Griffiths, "Socialism," 13

<sup>26</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 157.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4.

Port observes that the achievements of the revolutions were repeatedly emphasised in Granma, like health care, safety, and education. Port further observes that the system relied primarily on anti-Americanism<sup>28</sup> rather than classical Marxism. I believe this to be a clear observation, because if the system relied on classical Marxism, then periods of instability would have been portrayed within state discourse as necessary steps (antithesis) to a better future (synthesis), which is at first glance of our primary source Granma not the case.

The research concludes that during the 1990s, the legitimating role of *nationalism* became more prominent<sup>29</sup>, supported by the Revolution's historical roots and Cuban character. Port's main conclusion is that there were slight differences, but generally there was a continuation in the forms of legitimacy. Examples of this include defining itself in relation to the United States and the emphasis on the achievements of the revolution. New was that Cuba could use the collapse of the Soviet Union as a form of new legitimacy. By seeing crises in Eastern European countries, the disadvantages of departing from a socialist system could be highlighted. Port concluded that the discourse was inherently logic, coherent and consistent is the 1980s as well as the 1990s. There were no alternative discourses available contesting the coherency of the dominant one.

This is significantly different in the post-Castro era, as alternative discourses did become more available in the 21st century, even though Cuba remains the most restricted country in Latin America regarding internet freedom for its citizens. This has for long constituted the possibility of having a homogenous discourse as highlighted by Omar Granados<sup>30</sup>. Conversely, the internet is recently getting less restricted, giving rise to cultural heterogeneity<sup>31</sup>. This had planted a seed for a new civil society for Cubans forming itself relative to alternative discourses. The entry of alternative discourses through internet, where for long the state discourse was the only one with the ability

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<sup>28</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 67-68.

<sup>29</sup> Cuba became to 'imagine' itself more as a country and not as part of the Socialist block. It also began to promote itself more as a country by promoting its history and national heroes, which can constitute the country's identity and citizen's' subjectivity. Benedict Anderson observed that the imagination of a country is a core aspect of nationalism. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London / New York: Verso, 2006), 1-7.

<sup>30</sup> Omar Granados, "Voices Cuban," in *Online Activism in Latin America*, ed. Hilda Chacón (New York: Routledge, 2018), 176, <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315202303>.

<sup>31</sup> Granados, "Voices Cuban," 176.

to give meaning to concepts<sup>32</sup> and construct truths, makes it more likely that the legitimacy of the state can be undermined for discourses can arise that are contesting the state's truths. The use of internet had not only given Cuba a new source of information, but it had also given Cubans a platform, that has for example been used to mobilise others across the country on the day of the 2021 protests. It can also be used as a platform to become more visible and active internationally.

Cyberactivism has enabled many Cuban citizens to collaborate with online communities internationally and nationally without the authoritarian mediation of the state<sup>33</sup>, according to Granados. It is however true until today that the Cuban state holds a monopoly on all telecommunications services (internet included). Cuban citizens would thus need smart solutions to escape the state's mediation. Complete absence of the state's mediation in internet use and communications seems impossible for the state is mediating on a legal level. After the 2021 protests, the Cuban state passed a law that can convict persons making statements that go against the truths of the Cuban state. The Cuban state describes the law banning 'fake news' and generally sees internet and social media as 'dangerous' for it is easy to spread untrue, half-true, or manipulated news<sup>34</sup>, as also observed by Ted A. Henken and Sjamme van de Voort, who extensively researches the rise of internet usage in Cuba.

I think the availability of alternative discourses can possibly cause a shift in the Cuban state discourse. That this can be the effect of alternative discourses is observed by McLeod, who states, in the context of postcolonial discourses, that dominant discourses are problematic because they will always encounter alternative discourses and the alternative views can throw the authority of the dominant discourse into question<sup>35</sup>. I think alternative discourses can best be described as causing a blow to the coherency, consistency and internal logics of a discourse and can thus contribute to harming the process of discursive legitimisation.

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<sup>32</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 39-45.

<sup>33</sup> Granados, "Voces Cubanias," 180.

<sup>34</sup> Ted A. Henken and Sjamme van de Voort, "From Nada to Nauta: Internet Access and Cyber-Activism in a Changing Cuba," *Cuba in Transition: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy* 23 (2013): 341.

<sup>35</sup> John McLeod, "Reading Colonial Discourses," in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 67, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526153531>.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis evolves around the definitions of discourse, power, and legitimisation. There are various definitions of discourse that find themselves somewhere in the spectrum between discourse referring to language in general, and a stricter philosophical definition, which can be traced back to philosophers such as Michel Foucault, who emphasised the effect that discourse has on subjects<sup>36</sup>. What all definitions share is that they evolve around language and meaning. According to Sara Mills, discourse "refers to the collection of ideas in writing and speech that have meaning and can therefore express values, morality, truth, and ideology"<sup>37</sup>. Discourse consists of shared prepositions: what is believed to be true, displayed as truth, agreed upon as true and therefore acted upon. Thus, these shared prepositions, forming a set of coherent reasonings, are made explicit in actions and speech. The effect that discourses potentially have within a social context is important to this research. Therefore, I would like to add this to Mills' definition. This result is the definition of discourse as *the collection of ideas in writing and speech that have meaning and can therefore express values, morality, truth, and ideology and potentially have effect within a social context*.

Reality itself is structured, formed, and constituted by discourse. Thus, when I speak about the underlying social 'reality' in this research, I will use the term 'social context' to be consistent with the theoretical framework. Further, discourse imposes a perspective on subjects (often without subjects realising it<sup>38</sup>). Truth and knowledge about reality coincides with that perspective. Intuitively, the potential effect discourse has functions to a greater extent when there is only one dominant discourse. When alternative discourses are lacking, then there are no other 'truths' contesting the coherence of its statements and thus subjects are more likely to internalise the truths of the dominant discourse. In Cuba it is not hard to observe that there is no wide variety of alternative discourses compared to other parts of the world due to its late rise of internet access and social media usage as well as the state's monopoly in traditional media outlets.

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<sup>36</sup> Magnus Hörnqvist, *Risk, Power, and the State: After Foucault* (Routledge-Cavendish, 2010), Abstract, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203857052>.

<sup>37</sup> Sara Mills, "Introduction", in *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Stephanie Taylor, "Theories and common concerns," in *What is Discourse Analysis?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 19, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472545213.ch-002>.

In discourse lies power, exclusion<sup>39</sup> and submission. It therefore can determine and shape the behaviour of individuals in a society. It defines morality and excludes who do not conform to it. In this way, it does not only shape identity<sup>40</sup> but it is also an instrument to legitimise power. Power is a concept central in this research, which is underlined by the idea that power is productive and inherently unstable<sup>41</sup>. That power can be oppressive is not hard to imagine when viewing it in the light of state power, but for Foucault power is not necessarily state power. Power is productive in the way that it produces truths, identities, and subjectivity, which is done through discourse. Power is unstable because it needs constant reaffirmation instead of a justification in a single moment. Thus, power is 'inherently' unstable.

I do however believe that power can reach some form of stability when the process of (discursive) legitimisation is effective. When I speak of the Cuban state power being stable, then it is exactly this process of legitimisation that I refer to and not power itself. That these are two different things is clear from the fact that the process of legitimisation is necessary *because of* the inherent instability of power. Another instability of power is that the truths and meaning that it produces are subject to change. I would add that this is also true for moral valuations. Intuitively, you would say that for an authoritarian state it is easier to construct truths by for example a monopoly on media outlets.

Lukas Port clearly observes in his research on Cuban state discourse that the one in power is the one that can give meaning to concepts<sup>42</sup> (and construct truth). Port even concludes that through the 1990s the Cuban state had a hegemony in the production of meaning and thus speaks of 'hegemonic discourse'<sup>43</sup>. Power is unstable and needs constant reaffirmation and justification, or in other words: legitimisation. Power needs to be legitimised to function and maintain itself, because people must continue to accept the existing power. This process of legitimisation takes place through discourse and works by making claims that justify the existing power in place, its history, its behaviour, and its political project.

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<sup>39</sup> Sara Mills, "Introduction", 11.

<sup>40</sup> See: Steward Clegg, "Foucault, Power and Organizations," in *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory: From Panopticon to Technologies of Self*, edited by Alan McKinlay and Ken Starkey, 29-48. London / Thousand Oaks / New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Hörnqvist, *Risk, Abstract*.

<sup>42</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 157.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 38.

When it comes to a definition of legitimacy, Alba Ruibal provides an adequate definition that captures all the necessary elements. She states that legitimacy is (1) "a form of power grounded in recognition and acceptance of authority", (2) "it accepts the systems rulers, rules, and decision", (3) "social actors judge that the existing social arrangement and the distribution of power is justified"<sup>44</sup>. I believe this definition to be complete and accurate. Therefore, I will use this definition when asking question on the legitimacy of the Cuban state through its discourse. The definition captures the idea that power is in constant need of legitimisation and acceptance by the relevant social actors.

#### **1.4 Sources and Methods**

*Granma* is the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). Given that Cuba is a one party-state, it also serves as the official state newspaper. *Granma* was first published in 1965, six years after the end of the Revolution. The reason for this is that it was published with the foundation of the Communist Party in the same year. Cuba only became a communist state in 1965 and not in 1959. There is a lot of debate about whether the Cuban Revolution was a communist or socialist revolution at all, or if they had to turn towards the Soviet Union for financial impulse and for protection against the just defeated US.

Given that the newspaper primarily serves as a communication channel for the state and is heavily controlled, it cannot be taken as a reliable source of information about Cuban society nor about international society. Instead, it is evident that the newspaper is a vehicle for the state's power and legitimacy. Therefore, it does serve as an important source to shed light into how the Cuban state discursively constructs and legitimises its own position, in times of crisis. The newspaper's slogan is: 'Voice of Cuban's Communist Party'<sup>45</sup>. Although there are more newspapers in Cuba, they are all 'owned' by the Communist Party. The second biggest newspaper is *Juventud Rebelde*, founded by the Union of Young Communists<sup>46</sup>, which is the youth organization of the PCC. *Juventud Rebelde* is especially directed at younger generations (students), which is the main difference from *Granma*.

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<sup>44</sup> Alba Ruibal, "Legitimacy", in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Social Theory* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3182112>.

<sup>45</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Órgano Oficial del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba' (freely translated).

<sup>46</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas'.

Traditionally, *Granma* has consisted of four sections: national news, cultural news, international news, and sports. The four sections have not changed overtime even though the section's names were changed into 'Cuba', 'World', 'Culture' and 'Sports'. Though in the last 10 years, there is one section added to the newspaper called 'Opinion'. This gives the impression that there is more room for – and an increasing variety of – (other) ideas and opinions in Cuban state discourse. However, at first glance it appears that the new section mostly contains articles by the famous Cuban writer Graziella Pogolotti, who only writes articles that are in line with the dominant ideology.

*Granma* is not only published domestically, but also internationally. This is the case in both periods of analysis. '*Granma International*' is aimed at an international audience and is published on a weekly basis in Spanish as well as English. '*Granma International*' is a collection of the most important articles published throughout the week in the original *Granma*, but the content, tone and style can be adapted to match an international audience. For this research I have only used the original *Granma* newspapers that are aimed at a domestic audience, because this research aims to answer the question of how the Cuban state legitimises its power domestically and not internationally.

After 2017, the daily issues of *Granma* are available in digitalised form. They are published online on *Granma.cu*. For the *Granma*'s from the 1990s, I have travelled to the University of Nottingham to visit their famous 'Hennessy Collection'; the UK's biggest collection of study resources on Cuban history. I was able to scan over 100 *Granma* newspapers that were published throughout the 1990s. 25 of them (meaning 250 articles) came from the worst crisis years 1993 and 1994. I was able to find and scan *Granma* newspapers published surrounding key events in the 1990s, like the famous story of the diplomatic conflict between the US and Cuba over the repatriation of Elián González. The *Granma* issues from the days after the 1994 protest were missing in the 'Hennessey Collection', but those I was able to see at the National Library José Martí in Havana.

The IISH (International Institute of Social History) in Amsterdam has around 250 *Granma*'s in their archives, but only a few from 1989 and 1990 and none from the mid 1990s, when the worst days of the 'special period' were occurring. At the IISH I have seen and scanned around 50 *Granma*'s from the former period. Even though they officially fall outside the period of analysis, they are used as contextualisation. In short, the corpus of *Granma* issues that is covered is extensive and serves to be enough to obtain significant results and thus for the completion of the analysis.

The method of analysis of this research is discourse analysis. To analyse the primary source, I have constructed a model (Appendix A: Model for Discourse Analysis). In this manner, I can use the same framework for every article. The model allows me to directly go to the core of the article, extracting its relevant meaning and theme. The model is constructed to look for content, form, tone and meaning of the discourse and will show what the Cuban state regards to be important. The discourse analysis will be qualitative and will not have a decisive quantitative element.

Discourse analysis can be defined as "the examination of oral, written, or other expressions for their cultural, political, or ideological connotations"<sup>47</sup>. In this research, discourse analysis can identify and trace the development of (legitimising) claims used by the Cuban state at different times. It allows for an examination of the construction of ideology and the interpretation of reality. One of the main questions when doing discourse analysis is: who (what groups) can ascribe meaning to language and thus create meaning? Intuitively, in authoritarian states, less groups will be able to create meaning and structure reality. Specifically, the discourse analysis in this research aims to look at inclusion and exclusion<sup>48</sup>, which are main practises of discourse. The analysis intends to discover possible shifts and/or continuities in what groups are regarded as 'us' or 'we' and what group are seen as 'they' or 'them'. In close connection, it looks at moral valuations and moral positioning: who are regarded to 'good' or 'bad', and with that who are portrayed as friends or enemies. There will be given special consideration to the tone (diplomatic, aggressive, confident, insecure, etc.) of the discourse to discover possible shift in it. In short, the discourse analysis aims on finding discursive shifts and continuities and does so by letting the analysis evolve around 5 dominant themes in *Granma*: Fidel Castro, the mobilisation of history, the United States and its embargo, the achievements of the revolution and protest/dissidence.

To answer the research question and sub questions, discourse analysis is the suitable tool for it gives us insight in what was said and how it was said. To gain insight into the meaning of what was said, meaning being relative to its context, the historical periods of analysis will be extensively contextualised, starting with the 'special period'.

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<sup>47</sup> Taylor, "Theories," 19.

<sup>48</sup> Mills, "Introduction", 11.

## Chapter 2: The 'special period' (1991-1999)

This chapter aims on offering the necessary context of the period of analysis and thus contextualises the study of the Cuba state discourse in that period. The chapter intends to demonstrate the main characteristics and 'truths' of the Cuban state discourse in the 'special period'. First the context will be set, and the main characteristics of the special period will be covered, then it will discuss (the state discourse surrounding) a key event in the period when it comes to the possible contestation of the state's legitimacy; a spontaneous protest in 1994 known as 'El Maleconazo'. Lastly, this chapter will show and analyse the discourse in the latter half of the 1990's when Cuba was fighting itself out of the crisis period. This chapter ends with a conclusion on the state's discourse in the analysed period, and with that, its legitimacy.

### 2.1. Main Characteristics of the Special Period and its Discourse

The term 'Special Period' was first used by Fidel Castro right after the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>49</sup> to announce a period of change as Cuba now was obliged to start looking outward to other economies of the developed world<sup>50</sup> and could not rely on the stability anymore that the Soviet Union has offered the island for decades. The period was inaugurated officially by the Cuban state as the 'Special Period in Times of Peace'<sup>51</sup>. Only later, when the severeness of the economic crisis that followed became clear, 'special' began to function more and more as a euphemism. It is evident is that the term can serve as a euphemism, for it denotes a period of severe economic and humanitarian crisis<sup>52</sup>. It thus gives the impression that instability or a crisis in Cuba are not common nor ordinary. It was not the last time a period of crisis was discursively described, consciously or unconsciously, with a euphemism in Cuba. More recently, in 2019, the current period of crisis in the post-Castro era, was described with the term 'situación coyuntural' or 'problema coyuntural'<sup>53</sup>. The

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<sup>49</sup> Andrea Colantonio and Robert B. Potter, *Urban Tourism and Development in the Socialist State: Havana During the 'Special Period'* (London: Routledge, 2017), Abstract, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351143561>.

<sup>50</sup> Colantonio and Potter, *Urban Tourism*, Abstract.

<sup>51</sup> Esther Katheryn Whitfield, *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and "Special Period" Fiction* (Minneapolis /London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Arnaldo Silva León, *Breve Historia de la Revolución Cubana 1959-2000* (Havana: Editorial Felix Varela, 2008), 125.

<sup>53</sup> Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Cuba: Crisis Económica, sus Causas, el COVID-19 y las Políticas de Rescate," *Análisis*

term ‘conyunctural’ in Spanish denotes a cycle and is often used as opposed to structural. Hence, the state implicitly claims that periods of crisis are temporal and not common. Understating or overstating the severeness of situations, as demonstrated, can be imagined legitimising the continuity of the state’s project in times of crisis as well as justifying economic measures to be implemented.

There is a consensus<sup>54</sup> on what caused Cuba’s economic crisis in the 1990s: the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Comecon, and more specifically, the loss of trade with Comecon and the loss of financial aid of the Soviet Union. Cuba had long depended on the aid of the Soviet Union. Therefore, it had lacked building its own infrastructure and diversifying its own economy and trade partners. Most of Cuba’s trade was done with Comecon states<sup>55</sup>. It left Cuba with the task to build up its own economy, but it was already under sanctions by the United States, in the form of a trade embargo, since the 1960s. The starting point for the special period is clear because the Soviet Union was officially disintegrated in December 1991, and it directly had its effects on Cuba.

The end of the special period is mostly mentioned together with Venezuela emerging as Cuba’s new primary trading partner and ally. Venezuela’s former president Hugo Chavez set foot in Cuba for the first time in 1999<sup>56</sup>, when the severity of the crisis was already declining. There is no official end date to the special period. Either 1999 or 2000 are used as years wherein the period ended. In this research the period ends in 1999. This is chosen, because in 2000 a new era can be said to begin when it comes to the relationship between Cuba and Russia: Vladimir Putin is chosen as Russia’s new president.

The special period is especially interesting to analyse due to its severity. Intuitively, in times of severe crises a power is more likely to get contested. The question that is generally asked when it comes to Cuba in the 1990s is the same as the one central to this

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del Real Instituto Elcano 83 (June 2020): 2. Mesa-Largo claims that the crisis in the 1990s as well as the current one is structural, because there is a structural problem: the open (=dependent) economy, the planned economy, and the existence of large state enterprises (which has never worked). A further analysis of the economic causes of the crisis does not fall in the scope of this research.

<sup>54</sup> There is consensus between Cuban sources and western historiography. See for example: José C. Cantón Navarro and Arnaldo Silva León, *Historia de Cuba 1959-1999, Liberación Nacional y Socialismo* (Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 2011), 209-214 and Silva, *Breve Historia*, 122-125 on the one side of the spectrum, and Whitfield, *Cuban Currency*, 3-4 and Colantonio and Potter, *Urban Tourism*, Abstract, on the other side.

<sup>55</sup> Silva, *Breve Historia*, 124-125.

<sup>56</sup> Joaquín Rivery, “Despidió Fidel a Hugo Chávez en el Aeropuerto de José Martí: Yo Tengo a Cuba en mi Corazón,” *Granma*, November 20, 1999, 1.

chapter: how can it be that the economic crisis has not resulted in a political crisis of the same proportion?<sup>57</sup> Before delving into the state discourse in the special period and possibly seeing if there is evidence for this intuition, this chapter first illustrates the severity of the crisis by a description of the downfall of Cuba's economy and food and living conditions.

The special period is generally defined in terms of shortages<sup>58</sup>. There were not only shortages in food, but also in oil. Therefore, the state needed to reduce rationed foods at subsidised prices, which was supposedly one of the sources of legitimacy (the state made sure that no one was hungry) of the system that disappeared. That cats and dogs disappeared from the streets of Havana<sup>59</sup> adequately illustrates of how harsh the food crisis was. The shortage in oil necessarily transformed Cuba's economy and agriculture. The lack of energy recourses caused a halt to Cuba's industry and food production. More specifically, they started to produce organically again (using oxes to till the land instead of a tractor), which had its effect on the efficiency and thus quantity of food production<sup>60</sup>. Even if there was enough food, the state salary in combination with a reduction in subsidised foods and therefore the increase of selling food overpriced on the black market<sup>61</sup>, was not enough to provide for a daily nutritious meal.

In numbers, in the early special period (by 1992) international trade in Cuba had decreased by 70% compared to 1989. In these same years GDP had decreased 24% and the capacity and production of Cuba's industry had dropped 30%<sup>62</sup>. The two years after, these indicators had even decreased more. This downfall in the economy had a major impact on the life of Cubans. An example of this is that the average intake of calories had decreased from circa 3.000 in 1989 to 1.863 in 1993. There was increasing inflation and state deficit, which made it harder and harder to buy anything on the international market. This was not only hard due to the economic situation, but also because in 1992 the Torricelli Act

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<sup>57</sup> This is also one of the main questions in Silva, *Breve Historia*, 122. See also: Cantón and Silva, *Historia de Cuba*, 209.

<sup>58</sup> Daliany Jerónimo Kersh, *Women's Work in Special Period Cuba: Making Ends Meet* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2019), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05630-8>.

<sup>59</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 95-96.

<sup>60</sup> Hanna Garth, "Resistance and Household Food Consumption in Santiago de Cuba," in *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy*, ed. Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 51, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350042155.ch-004>.

<sup>61</sup> Kersh, *Women's Work*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Silva, *Breve Historia*, 123.

(officially the Cuban Democracy Act) became effective, which is a US bill that tightens the US embargo on Cuba preventing other nations to aid or trade with Cuba<sup>63</sup>. At the same time Cuba wanted and needed to open to foreign direct investment. Life changed dramatically for Cubans in the special period, and many tried to flee the country, which was illegal at the time. An estimation of around 30.000 Cubans have fled the island during the special period. Most of them fled in 1994 in the so called 'rafter crisis' that followed on a spontaneous protest on which Fidel Castro reacted by changing emigration laws. The rest of this paragraph aims to show and give the first general idea of the state discourse and its truths in the 1990s, and then analysis this discourse to see how the Cuban state has discursively addressed the crisis and legitimised the continuation of its project.

To get a general idea of the 1990s discourse, I started by globally analysing some *Granma* newspapers from 1989 and 1990. This was done to be able to discover a possible shift in the state's discourse with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There are some shifts visible in the state's discourse before and after 1991, but they are logical with regards to the collapse of the communist bloc, that could thus not be used as a source of legitimacy anymore. Lukas Port saw that "the discourse reflected this crisis by largely dropping the reference to the construction of communism and instead spoke more about preserving the achievements of the revolution, such as social benefits"<sup>64</sup>. The construction of communism (with reference to Comecon) was inevitably dropped from the state's discourse, the discourse turned inward promoting its own project of socialism and continuation of its own revolution. This often was addressed in a moral tone that it is the people's duty to continue the socialist project in Cuba to have a good future for their children: "Defending our socialism means defending and guaranteeing the future of our children"<sup>65</sup>.

The discourse turned inward and began to promote its own *nationalism*<sup>66</sup> more.

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<sup>63</sup> Joy Gordon, "Extraterritoriality: Issues of Overbreadth and the Chilling Effect in the Cases of Cuba and Iran," *Harvard International Law Journal*, online 57, (Jan 18, 2016): 1-12.

<sup>64</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse", 96.

<sup>65</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Defender nuestro socialismo es defender y garantizar el futuro de nuestros hijos". Katiuska Blanco, Iraida Calzadilla and Enrique Sains Fals, "Defender Nuestro Socialismo es Defender y Garantizar el Futuro de Nuestros Hijos," *Granma*, November 21, 1989, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Lukas Ports also point this out: Port, "Hegemonic Discourse", 97. Interesting to know it that Cuba's nationalism is very implicit. There is no such thing a nationalist promotion movement in Cuba for example. There are differences from European nationalism. Anderson in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1-7, states that every revolution after WW2 has defined itself in national terms, and that the nation (nationalism is promoting the nation) is imagined, limited, sovereign, and a community. I believe Anderson's definition of

This is visible in the 1990s by a discourse that has the aim to unite. For example, history (historical events and figures that have shaped Cuba's course of history) is more often mobilised in *Granma*. Historical event and figures, as well as cultural symbols, like the Cuban flag, are often visible in *Granma*.

That this development in the discourse is already visible in 1989 and not only after 1991, supports the idea that at the end of that decade, the Cuban state had an idea of the future disintegration of the Soviet Union. An argument widely used nowadays in Cuba, that explains the direct and severe impact of the collapse of the SU on Cuba, is that the Cuban state did not see these affairs coming, because news from the SU reached Cuba in a censored form. Therefore, Cuba had little time to prevent and react on the event. I think it would be more likely to say that the Cuban people did not see the affairs coming, as in *Granma* itself this promotion of nationalism over reference to the ideology of the Soviet Union was already visible in 1989 and 1990, even though the course of events are not explicitly addressed. In the newspapers the days after the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, this event was not directly addressed at all; not on the front page, nor in the international news section.

A phenomenon in the Cuban state discourse that is visible since 1989 and continues throughout the 1990s is that the discourse turns inward: from promoting the worldwide project of communism to promoting its own project of the continuation of socialism and the revolution. This is however described as a positive development, as now the project of the state is described, after decades of ideological attachment to the SU, as continuity from the Marxist-Leninist base, but perfecting its own society: "The Communist Party of Cuba is at this time, ..., the guarantee of the continuity of our socialist cause and the revolutionary unity of the people, the bastion of resistance against the harassment of imperialism"<sup>67</sup>. In the same article that this quote comes from, the word 'perfecting' is mentioned in

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nationalism is, next to capturing European nationalism, also adequate for Cuba's nationalism, but the limitation of the nation is clearer for it being an island. The claim that every revolution after WW2 has defined itself in national terms, I believe to be true for Cuba as in the time of the Revolution there was no or little reference to the project of building a socialist state/block yet. Thus, we could say Cuba's nationalism, that was prevalent in its Revolution, returned after the disintegration of Comecon.

<sup>67</sup> Originally in Spanish: " El Partido Comunista de Cuba es en este momento, ..., la garantía de la continuidad de nuestra causa socialista y de la unidad revolucionaria del pueblo, el baluarte de la resistencia contra el acoso del imperialismo". *Granma* [author not mentioned], "El Futuro de Nuestra Patria Será un Eterno Baraguá," *Granma*, March 16, 1990, 4-5.

combination with 'society' several times<sup>68</sup>. It gives the impression of a positive outlook towards future state building. On multiple occasions the state's future is addressed in a positive tone with a positive outlook and moral duty towards the younger generations with a confidence in the younger generations for shaping the future and perfect society. In short, Cuban state discourse in the turbulent years of 1989 and 1990 reflects but not directly addresses the main international events in these years. The discourse does turn inward: it promotes its own nationalism and society building in a positive tone.

An analysis of the Cuban state discourse in the 1990s is what this chapter will continue with. First, I intend to give a general idea of what the Cuban state discourse at that time consisted of and how the state legitimised itself. What stands out in the Cuban state discourse is the strong language used, that I will from now on refer to as *revolutionary discourse*. Examples of this are terms like battle, struggle ('lucha'), defend ('defender'), death ('muerte') or terms like 'threat', 'fight' and 'honour'. These terms give the impression of a war discourse in times of peace and don't appear that peaceful. It is as if the discourse from the Revolution (1953-1959) is still used and applied to other phenomena.

The most obvious truths that the Cuban state discourse hold are not hard to extract and don't require a very elaborate and lengthy research, because most issues of *Granma* contain multiple or all of the following main claims extracted: (1) The Cuban Revolution (socialism) is a continuous project, (2) the Cuban Revolution has achieved great things: social security, free health care and education, and (3) the US (Embargo) is the cause of instability in Cuba. It is also not hard to see the main moral appreciations within the discourse, and the internal logics of the discourse. The discourse follows a simple scheme of good and bad, or in terms corresponding with the discourse: of 'attack' and 'defend'. That what is seen to be 'attacking' the revolution is imperialism, capitalism (or 'the capitalist countries) and the yanks/yankees<sup>69</sup>. The Cuban state often discursively defines itself in opposition to these concepts and in this way defines its own ideology or system to what it is not; to what it is contrary to.

Partly corresponding with these legitimising claims the discourse analysis in the following parts concentrates on the most important and widely addressed themes in *Granma* and will compare them between the two time periods and within the selected

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<sup>68</sup> "El perfeccionamiento de la sociedad". See: *Granma*, "El Futuro," 4.

<sup>69</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Yankis'. *Granma* [author not mentioned], "Siguen los Ataques Yankis en las Zonas de Exclusión Aérea en Iraq," *Granma*, January 27, 1999, 8.

time periods to see how themes discursively develop and how they might be discursively addressed differently in different time periods or contexts. The 5 themes dominant in 1990s *Granma* discourse are: (1) the achievements of the revolution (safety, banning hunger and illiteracy, free education, and health care), (2) the US, Cuba's relationship with the US and the US Embargo, (3) history: mobilising historical events and persons, (4) Fidel Castro/presidency and (5) dissidents and protesters.

Within Cuban state discourse these themes are internally coherent but can be distinguished from each other externally even though they can be present at the same time. The next subchapter serves as an example of this, as in the state discourse surrounding a major protest is the 1990s of Cubans expressing their frustrations, all these themes are covered.

## **2.2. 'El Maleconazo'**

In 1993 and 1994 the economic crisis and food shortages worsened. Dissatisfaction with the current situation grew under Cubans. It resulted in a spontaneous protest on August 5, 1994, when small riots of people expressing their frustration with the current situation began in the streets of Havana. Protesters were mainly frustrated by the inability to leave the country. Some unsuccessful attempts to hijack boats and leave the island took place in the weeks before the protest<sup>70</sup>. On the day of the protest the police actively blocked people to prevent them boarding tugboats, which resulted in some hundred Cubans taking the streets in a protest that predominantly was located at Havana's coastline the Malecon. It was the largest protest Cuba had seen since the 1959 Revolution.

During the protest, when most were expressing their frustration with Cuba's immigration laws, some protesters also shouted 'Abajo Fidel' (down with Fidel). There are however only few instances known of these expressions; not enough to conclude that the continuation of Fidel's power was at stake, and in my opinion not even enough to conclude that there was any consensus in ascribing any causes of the economic crisis to Fidel's implemented policies. That there was still respect for the country's leader became clear by Fidel's appearance on the Malecon to calm down the protesters. This attempt was successful as it reportedly resulted in the crowd chanting *iViva Fidel!*<sup>71</sup> (Live Fidel!).

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<sup>70</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse", 103.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 104.

In the months prior to the protests, wherein the economic situation had gotten worse, the Cuban state only addressed the economic situation in Granma in a very limited way. That the Cuban state discursively tried to weaken the seriousness of the crisis and aimed to legitimise its own project, becomes clear in how the economic situation is addressed and compared to other states. An article published in *Granma*<sup>72</sup> in April 1994 describes that 192 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean (Cuba defines itself as both) live in absolute poverty, which is 46% of the people. The *Granma* article implies that the cause of poverty is that (a) governments have reduced spending instead of increased the income through taxes, (b) this has had a bad effect on the quality of services like education, health care and social security. (c) Therefore, there are a lot of adolescents without a degree or work and (d) in these countries there is a rise in poverty, delinquency, and infant mortality. Countries where this is happening are said to be Guatemala, Peru, and Haiti. Cuba defines itself in opposition to these countries and highlight the aspects of society, in this case education, that are well established and well-functioning in Cuban society: "In education, the poor quality and inefficiency of the primary education system remains a problem in most countries, with nearly 20 million school-age children often repeating the same grade"<sup>73</sup>. This rhetoric could be aimed on positioning itself as an example to the region. But from the knowledge that *Granma* predominantly has a domestic audience, it follows that the Cuban state aims to legitimise itself towards the Cuban people. Other aspects of Cuban society that the article implicitly highlights are low unemployment rates, low infant mortality and the absence of discrimination.

The research addressed in the article further claims that there is a lot of poverty in the region as 46% per cent of the people live in absolute poverty<sup>74</sup>. The *Granma* article does not say anything factually about the situation in Cuba (how many people live in poverty or how the economy shrunk or grew) but highlights that in other parts of the region to situation is worse. It is not uncommon within Cuban state discourse to compare its own situation to other states and conclude that the situation in Cuba is 'not that bad'. Poverty is here the example 'used' for this purpose. It is possible that a Cuban citizen

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<sup>72</sup> *Granma* [author not mentioned], "Viven en Absoluta Pobreza 192 Millones de Personas", *Granma*, April 29, 1994, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Originally in Spanish: "En los aspectos de educación, indique la mala calidad e inefficiencia del sistema de enseñanza primaria sigue siendo un problema en la mayoría de los países, donde casi 20 millones de niños en edad escolar suelen repetir el curso". *Granma*, "Absoluta Pobreza", 4.

<sup>74</sup> Absolute poverty is not defined in the article but is normally defined as not being able to meet basic needs.

reading this article loses interest in leaving Cuba to a nearby state after reading that the situation is economically worse in the states surrounding Cuba. That Cubans were leaving the island was the reality at the time<sup>75</sup>, and especially in the months that the article was published. The article can be seen as an indirect reaction to these events. It is not uncommon to read an article in *Granma* that does not address ongoing events directly, but indirectly addresses it by making legitimising claims evolving around the content of the subject matter. I believe that this article has shown that to some extent.

The protests that eventually broke out in 1994 of Cubans wanting to leave the country could be seen as evidence that this legitimising discourse was not effective at that time. But that the protests calmed down quickly and that the power itself was little contested (protesters aimed at a change of policy over a change of government) can be seen as evidence for the legitimising discourse still functioning.

Further, it will be interesting to see how the protests and protesters were dealt with discursively by the Cuban state and what they regard as the causes of the protests. Who was to blame for the protests becomes clear from an article including a transcript of the reaction that Raúl Castro gave on the protests: "The big culprit in this crime is the United States government"<sup>76</sup>. The US were addressed as having caused the economic crisis that had triggered the protests. In the same issue of *Granma*, the lengthy speech of Fidel given on the day of the protests is included. Fidel Castro addresses the causes of the protests to a lesser extent. What mainly stands out in the issue of *Granma* the day after the protests is that the person Fidel Castro is praised with superlatives as 'extraordinary'<sup>77</sup> (referring to his presence that day). The events are addressed as a confirmed and new faith in the leader rather than a sign of dissatisfaction. The state tries to interpret the events in a positive way and rather lays emphasis on the presence of Fidel rather than the reason for the presence of Fidel.

What is said about the protests itself follows the internal logic of the discourse and evolved around the legitimising claim that the US is directly (interference, funding) and less directly (the embargo) responsible for all economic problems and civil unrest in Cuba. The protests were described as 'provocations', which has a less negative connotation than riots

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<sup>75</sup> Silva Leon, *Breve Historia*, 127.

<sup>76</sup> Originally in Spanish: "El gran culpable de este crimen es el gobierno de los Estados Unidos". Raúl Castro Ruz, "El Gran Culpable de Este Crimen es el Gobierno de los Estados Unidos", *Granma*, August 8, 1994, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Granma*, "Gran Culpable", 3.

or protests. The protesters were described as either 'anti-patriotic' and 'perpetrators'. With patriotism referring to Cuba's revolution, the protesters are opposed to that and thus excluded from the good state's project. Other terms that were connected to the protesters were 'traidorzueros' and 'annexionistas'<sup>78</sup>. The provocations are put in an even more negative light by stating that they were directly funded by the US, which makes to US not only responsible for the cause of the protests but also for the protests itself. It also associates the protesters with the US, excluding them more from the state's project and forming public opinion on the protesters. With right Port claims that the hijackers and rioters are used as an 'instrument of imperial (US) aggression'<sup>79</sup> in the discourse.

Omnipresent in Granma articles covering the protests are the pronouns we/us (nosotros, nuestros) and them/they (ellos). In this way there is emphasis on the differences between the Cuban project and the US attack on it. Here, the US is clearly the enemy, and the protesters are placed in the same category as the US, because they are described with the same terms. They are excluded from the good project of Cuba's revolution, which is one of the main workings of discourse. It also works in a way to unite Cubans against the US and against the protesters that were described with 'they'. In general, the tone on the issue of Granma is very secure. The state is very confident about its own project and about what caused the disturbances. The discursive reaction from the Cuban state on the 1994 disturbances is coherent and consistent. It is full of the legitimising claims that were already present in the 1990s discourse.

The discourse surrounding 'El Maleconazo' emphasises Fidel's loyalty to the Cuban people, excludes the protesters from the good project of the revolution and confirms that the US embargo and interference only have caused the protests. They correspond with the general 'truths' within the Cuban state discourse. The discourse does not show signs of inconsistencies or incoherency. Through discourse analysis in this period the conclusion is that the legitimacy of the state was not at stake nor contested. But it also shows that the main foundation of the continuation on the power in place is the person, Fidel Castro. That the protests quickly blew once Fidel appeared and that civil stability returned after Fidel changed the existing immigration laws, allowing Cubans to leave the country, shows that

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<sup>78</sup> I have used the original Spanish terms here because there is no literal translation for them in English. 'Traidorzueros' denotes the superlative of traitor and 'annexionistas' in this context would mean that the protesters are in favour of annexing Cuba to the United States. Raúl Castro Ruz, "Si Alguien Debe Sentir Miedo Son los Traidorzueros, los Anexionistas de Este Siglo," *Granma*, August 9, 1994, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse", 103.

the social dissatisfaction was limited against certain aspects of the state rather than the existence of the power in place in general. That some 33.000 have fled the country during the 'rafter crisis' following the change of policy by the state interpreted and described in a positive way in Granma: in this way the Cuban state could get rid of the 'rotten apples'; the perpetrators who do not support the good project of the revolution. Without them, the project of the revolution (with only revolutionaries left) was considered an easier task.

### 2.3. Discourse of Recovery

In the years following the rafter crisis<sup>80</sup> the economic situation in Cuba started to improve little by little<sup>81</sup>. The Cuban state discourse had not explicitly addressed this stage of recovery much, for it would imply that there was something to recover from. But what does stand out in Granma during this time is the omnipresence of the theme of the achievements of the Cuban revolution. In 1995, these achievements are addressed predominantly in terms of agriculture<sup>82</sup> and are addressed in very positive terms. Opening any Granma from these years will most probably result in reading phrases like 'A good month for planting sugar cane'<sup>83</sup>, 'a positive balance for agriculture'<sup>84</sup> and 'more than 15 million quintals of vegetables and other foods produced<sup>85</sup>'.

The emphasis on agriculture is logical considering that the sector was hit hard in the years before due to a shortage of oil that had caused even more shortages in food. It is also logical because agriculture has been at the core of reforms since the Revolution. Recovery of the agricultural sector is rather addressed as a general increase of agricultural production as achievement in the revolution. However, when increase in agricultural

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<sup>80</sup> The rafter crisis only lasted from August 1994 to November 1994, as in November 1994 Fidel Castro reversed some of his emigration policies. In May 1995 the US and Cuba reached a migration accord: Cubans picked up at sea would be repatriated instead and granted a Green Card. See: Ted Henken, "Balseros, Boteros, and El Bombo: Post-1994 Cuban Immigration to the United States and the Persistence of Special Treatment", *Latin Studies* 3 (November 2005), 393, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.lst.8600159>.

<sup>81</sup> Cantón and Silva, *Historia de Cuba*, 215-217.

<sup>82</sup> Before 1994/1995 challenges in agriculture were addressed widely in Granma. Agricultural reform is seen as one of the three pillars (or promises) of the revolution next to free health care and education. See: Cantón and Silva, *Historia de Cuba*, 13-14.

<sup>83</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Buen mes para la siembra de caña'. Juan Varela Pérez, Juan, "Buen Mes Para La Siembra De Caña," *Granma*, Jun 6, 1995, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Saldo positive para la agricultura'. Manolo Rodríguez Salas, "Saldo Positivo Para La Agricultura," *Granma*, Jun 6, 1995, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Producidos más de 15 millones de quintales de viandas y vegetales'. Ortelio González Martínez, "Producidos Mas De 15 Millones De Quintales De Viandas Y Vegetales," *Granma*, June 6, 1995, 2.

production is discursively connected (associated) with recovery: "the country is in the (good) condition to start the recovery of rice production"<sup>86</sup>, then Granma does not forget to mention that the cause that the sector had to recover was merely the shortage of oil. The article does not highlight that there is recovery to be done from the special period, but emphasis on the good conditions of producing that were already present before the special period and focuses on what that could mean for the future: "...including the perspective to increase rice production to historical levels in a few years"<sup>87</sup>. In this way the Cuban state offers a very solid perspective – that was lacking in the years before – to its people as to when the food shortages will be solved. That the state claims to be capable of achieving this in the next years is legitimising the continuation of their project at least for a short term.

The same article states that "It stands out that during the special period it has been achieved to maintain the same level of rice consumption"<sup>88</sup>. Interesting here is the verbal/grammatical tense used is present perfect rather than past simple ('has been achieved' rather than 'were able to achieve'), which implies that the Cuban state discursively expresses that the special period was still going in 1995. In the context of this article on recovery, I find it interesting that the discourse does not take the opportunity to distinguish between the harsh 'special period' and the time of recovery.

That the term is a euphemism we have argued at the beginning of this chapter. By using the term within the state discourse, it turns out that at the time of the special period the term did not have a very negative connotation. In summary, a study of Granma in the first years after the 'Maleconazo' episode, the achievements of the revolution are mainly highlighted in terms of agriculture. The Cuban state offers the people a perspective out of the food crisis and the positive aspects of food production before the crisis period are highlighted.

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<sup>86</sup> Originally: "Esta el país en condiciones de iniciar la recuperación del arroz". Jorge Luis Batista, "Esta El País En Condiciones De Iniciar La Recuperación Del Arroz," *Granma*, November 8, 1995, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Originally: "...incluso con las perspectivas de incrementar los niveles históricos en pocos años". Luis, "El País", 1.

<sup>88</sup> Originally: "Destaco que en el periodo especial se ha podido lograr mantener el consumo de arroz normado la población", Luis, "El País", 1.

### 2.3.1 The Famous Case of Elián González

The last part of this chapter, before its conclusions on the 1990s Cuban state discourse, will focus on the theme 'US', illustrated by the example of the famous story of Elián González. On 25 November 1999, a Cuban boy named Elián González was rescued by two fishermen a few miles off the Florida coast<sup>89</sup>. The boy was only 6 years old and survived by clinging to an inner tube. Attempting to reach Florida over sea his mother had passed away. The boy was identified by the US coast guard and was brought to relatives in Florida to recover.

When the news reached Cuba, and especially the boy's father, who had not agreed on making the dangerous trip overseas, the Cuban government, as well as the boy's father, demanded the boy to return to Cuba immediately. It soon turned out to become an international diplomatic custody and immigration conflict. In Cuba it became the talk of the day, and it was widely covered in the Cuban state's newspaper *Granma*. Showing how the Cuban state has discursively expressed itself on the famous case of Elián González is the primary goal of this analysis.

The conflict was one mainly between Cuba and the United States. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how Cuba has positioned itself morally/ideologically in relation to the US. Erin J. Bernard noted that domestically Cuba 'used' the event to reinforce its revolutionary ideology: "Cuba's state-run media outlets have long acted as conduits for the construction and reinforcement of Revolutionary ideology. This was particularly true during the Battle of Ideas, an ideological campaign that aimed to mobilise Cuban youth in the wake of the 1999 Elián González crisis"<sup>90</sup>.

An analysis of *Granma* of the days of the heated debate surrounding the boy's faith (possible repatriation), supports this observation. Where Bernard states that the battle of ideas<sup>91</sup> has reinforced revolutionary ideology in Cuba, the matter Elián specifically has rather aimed to reinforce unity in ideology and morality under Cubans. This becomes clear in phrases used in *Granma* like: "Elian does not need lawyers or federal courts; Elian is

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<sup>89</sup> Erin J. Bernard "*Patria o Muerte*: Ideograph and Metanarrative in Cuban State-Produced Media During the Battle of Ideas". (MA Thes., University of Missouri, 2009), 1.

<sup>90</sup> Bernard, "*Patria o Muerte*", Abstract.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard defined the battle of ideas as "an ideological campaign directed at young Cubans, a politically silent contingent of the population who had grown up during the destitution of post-Soviet Cuba, a time of scarcity referred to euphemistically as the "Special Period." The campaign aimed to give "a potentially lost generation a stake in the system". See: Bernard, "*Patria o Muerte*", 2.

defended by the Cuban people”<sup>92</sup> or “For Elián’s liberty, our truth and the dignity of all Cubans”<sup>93</sup>. Here, the Cuban state clearly aims to unite and include.

Today the term ‘battle of ideas’ is still used widely in Cuba and in Cuban state discourse with the meaning of ‘critical thinking’, which is promoted as one of the pillars of the Cuban revolution<sup>94</sup>. Researchers that are supportive to the Cuban system ascribe to this truth that Cubans are stimulated, in education for example, to be and think critically<sup>95</sup>. In political research on Cuba conducted by researchers less supportive of the Cuban system, the Cuban state discourse surrounding critical thought<sup>96</sup> is seen as a deception; the Cuban state legitimises its dominant ideology under providing ostensible freedom of ideas.

Granma’s discourse surrounding the case Elián is in support of the second group of researchers, as the discourse seeks to unite morally and doesn’t leave much room for other morals, opinions, and ideas. Also, Bernard noted that the battle of ideas was an ideological campaign aimed on the younger generation for them to continue the project of the revolution and therefore to continue the state’s project. Even though, ‘battle of ideas’ might suggest that ideas that were deviating from the dominant truth were now considered or given a place in the political debate, it was only a campaign to reinforce the dominant ideology on current and future generations, that were made believed that they were thinking critically<sup>97</sup>, but this had to stay in line with the dominant ideology.

It also turns out that the Cuban state discourse addresses the case Elián on a very emotional level, trying to evoke emotions of belonging and identity with the Cuban people. Examples of this can for example be found in an article that reports on Fidel Castro visiting the primary school in Cardenas where the boy went to. The article reports on the dialogue between Fidel and states that when Fidel asked in the boy’s class “Why are you sure he will

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<sup>92</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Elián no necesita abogados ni cortes federales, a Elián le defenderá el pueblo de Cuba”. Katiuska Blanco, “Elián no Necesita Abogados Ni Cortes Federales, a Elián Le Defenderá El Pueblo De Cuba,” *Granma*, December 3, 1999, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Por la libertad de Elián, por nuestra verdad y por la dignidad de los Cubanos”. Felix Lopez, “Por La Libertad De Elián, Por Nuestra Verdad Y Por La Dignidad De Los Cubanos,” *Granma*, December 8, 1999, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Parvathi Kumaraswami, “Cuba: Five Years After Fidel Castro’s Death, How Fares the Revolution?,” *The Conversation*, November 24, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/cuba-five-years-after-fidel-castro-s-death-how-fares-the-revolution-172434>.

<sup>95</sup> Kumaraswami, “Cuba.”

<sup>96</sup> To illustrate this: Intellectual discussions that take place between professors at the University of Havana and others are bundled and published as the series ‘Pensamiento Crítico’, which means ‘critical thought’.

<sup>97</sup> To illustrate this: I once saw a 7- or 8-year-old girl walking the streets of Havana with a schoolbook titled ‘Capitalism and its Mistakes’. Implementing a book critical on Marxist theory in Cuba for is unthinkable.

return?"<sup>98</sup>. Granma states that more than 12 children responded to his question and one of them answered: "...because he is Cuban, his school is here, his friend and his fatherland"<sup>99</sup>". From this speaks a sense of belonging, identity, and morality, which characterises the Cuban state discourse surrounding this matter. The discourse aims to evoke emotions of belonging and Cuban identity as well as sympathy for the situation of Elián. What structures the feeling on this matter is the frequent use of diminutives: Elián is addressed as 'Eliáncito' (little Elain) and 'Compañeros' (friends) as 'Compañeritos'. The discourse predominantly has an emotional and moral tone.

The analysis of Granma in the eventful days of the Elián case also aims at answering how the United States, Cuba's sworn enemy, were portrayed in this conflict. This might give us insight in how the Cuban state and culture are imagined, for these are normally defined and imagined contrary to the US. The United States are mainly described as being unsensitive in this matter, which follows the lines and coherency of the rest of the discourse. Granma asks the US: "A hand that doesn't sign? A heart that doesn't feel?"<sup>100</sup>. The context of the article is that the article states that the US is one of two<sup>101</sup> countries that had not ratified<sup>102</sup> the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. But more than 'not acting in accordance with international consensus' the US is described in terms of morality, always carefully and diplomatically distinguishing between the US government and its people: "I have never declared myself an enemy of the American people, but of those who arbitrarily use the power of that country to commit great abuses and crimes"<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Originally in Spanish: "¿Ustedes están seguros de que regresará?". Freely translated as 'Why are you sure he will return?'. It can be translated more literally as 'Are you sure that he will return?', but I think this translation is not in line with the intention and meaning of the question, because Fidel is clearly not asking 5-year-old *if* their classmate will return. Ventura de Jesús, "Nuestro Pueblo Les Promete Que, Más Temprano Que Tarde, Tendrán Otra Vez a Eliáncito Entre Ustedes," *Granma*, December 7, 1999, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Originally in Spanish: "...porque es Cubano, y aquí está su escuela, sus compañeritos y su Patria". Even though Patria (Fatherland) is a widely used term within Cuban discourse, it is hard to believe a 5-year-old would express himself in this way. De Jesús, "Nuestro Pueblo," 1.

<sup>100</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Mano que no firma, corazón que no siente?". Vladia Rubio, "¿Mano Que no Firma, Corazón Que no Siente?" *Granma*, December 8, 1999, 4.

<sup>101</sup> The other country is not mentioned.

<sup>102</sup> Title can be misleading as the US has signed the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child but has not ratified the convention. One of the rights in this convention is that a child has, when possible, the right to have a relation with its parents (art. 18). It is clear how this can be used as (a) portraying the US as unsensitive not being in favour of these basic right and (b) that the international community would support the decision bringing Elián back home to his parents.

<sup>103</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Nunca me he declarado enemigo del pueblo norteamericano, sino de aquellos que arbitrariamente utilizan el poder de ese país para cometer grandes abusos y crímenes". Fidel Castro always

The occasion is 'used' to paint an immoral picture of the enemy the US but up to a certain extend. The US decision to initially not let the Cuban boy return to the island is described as 'illegal', 'cruel' and a couple of times as 'criminal'<sup>104</sup>. 'Criminal' is rather paired with the US blockade in general that with this isolated ordeal: "They don't realise that by doing so, they only succeed in mobilising our people and making them indignant when they realise the magnitude of the crime. It is stupid, especially on the part of a government that wants to destroy this revolution. This only makes us stronger ...., although for us the life of a child, his pain, and the suffering of a family is worth more than an atom of the strengthening of the revolution"<sup>105</sup>. As demonstrated by this quote the Cuban state sees the necessity to paint a negative picture of the US and expresses so discursively. Americans are in this part also constructed as ignorant or stupid by stating that they don't realise what they are doing. Besides this we have seen that from the Cuban state discourse surrounding the case Elián, speaks an urge to unite the Cubans morally and ideologically. Apparently, there was some necessity in doing so at the end the crisis years of the 'Special Period' (1991-1999). But there are no real signs in the discourse of the legitimacy of the power being in distress or contested.

### **2.3.2 History and Storytelling**

Another dominant theme in 1990s Granma, that is not present the state's discourse surrounding the Elian Gonzalez case but is omnipresent throughout Granma in the 1990s, is the mobilisation of history. This mainly occurs in the form of remembrance (addressing the significance and meaning) of historical events and historical figures that shaped Cuban history and storytelling on things surrounding these events or figures: "...General Antonio explained to the enemy Martinez Campos that there would never be peace in Cuba without independence. The Maceo army will continue to fight, until victory at the last moment, for the freedom of the homeland"<sup>106</sup>. As also illustrated by this excerpt, when history is

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emphasises on distinguishing between the American people and the US government, as he normally calls himself a friend on the people. De Jesús, "Nuestro Pueblo," 1.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Originally: "No se dan cuenta que con ello solo logran que nuestro pueblo se movilice, se indigne al captar la magnitud del crimen. Es una estupidez, sobre todo de parte de un gobierno que quiere destruir esta revolución. Con ello solo consiguen fortaleceros más...aunque para nosotros la vida de un niño, su dolor, y el sufrimiento de una familia vale más que un átomo del fortalecimiento de la Revolución".

<sup>106</sup> Originally in Spanish: "...el general Antonio explicó al enemigo Martínez Campos que nunca habría paz en

mobilised, revolutionary discourse is used to describe historical events and figures.

Mobilising history can have a unifying effect on the people when they remember their shared history<sup>107</sup> and ideals. Interesting to see is that the continuation of the project of the revolution is addressed limitedly. When it comes to Cuban identity, the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) does not appear to be a rupture nor most important point of reference. On the contrary, there are many references to important historical figures from before the Revolution; mainly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this time both the Ten Years' War<sup>108</sup> (1868-1878), which was the first war of independence against the Spanish wherein slavery in Cuba was abolished, and the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898), accumulating in the Spanish-American War (1898) occurred, wherein Cuba succeeded to gain its independence from its coloniser Spain. José Martí (1853-1895), Cuba's national hero, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (1819-1874), Cuba's father of the fatherland, are found widely in *Granma* and are both described as figures that have formed the identity of what it is to be Cuban (heroic, benevolent, and ready to die for the fatherland<sup>109</sup>, i.e., patriotic). Next to these two figures the most important generals from both wars; like Antonio Maceo Grajales<sup>110</sup>, are addressed in *Granma* widely and serve the same purpose. That history is mobilised to unite and construct a shared identity is in line with the general observation that, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Cuban state discourse turns inward and increases promoting its own nation, history, and culture. It seems that through its national heroes and their characteristics, the Cuban state is constructing a Cuban identity/subjectivity, constituting what it means to be Cuban.

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Cuba sin independencia. Los Maceo seguirían luchando, hasta la victoria a la Muerte, por la Libertad de la Patria". Pedro A. García, "Grandeza y Decoro de una familia Heroica", *Granma*, December 7, 1995, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel states that it is common to mentally create bridges between the past and present to make sense of the present. In this way our identity can seem continuous from a certain point, and we can imagine sharing a history. See: Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press), 39-40. In the case of the mobilisation of history by the Cuban state, (the continuation of) a heroic identity since the Wars of Independence is emphasised.

<sup>108</sup> The Ten Years' War lasted from 1868 to 1878. It is also referred to with the 'Great War' (La 'Guerra Grande') as opposed to the 'Little War' (1879-1880). The Ten Years' War was the first war of independence against the Spanish. The war was lost, but in the war, slavery was officially abolished. Cuba's father of the fatherland Carlos Manuel de Céspedes is seen as responsible for waging the war as well as the abolishment of slavery. For more information see: Vanessa Michelle Ziegler, "The Revolt of 'the Ever-Faithful Isle': The Ten Years' War in Cuba, 1868-1878 (PhD diss., University of California, 2007), 3-4, and Karen Robert, "Slavery and Freedom in the Ten Years' War, Cuba, 1868-1878," *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 13, no. 3 (June 2008): 181-200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399208575072>.

<sup>109</sup> Originally in Spanish: "libertar a la Patria o morir por ella". García, "Grandeza," 5.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4. Conclusion: A Stable Power

The closing part of this chapter offers conclusions on the Cuban state discourse in the special period (1991-1999). It does so by describing how the 5 dominant themes: *Fidel Castro, The United States, the achievements of the revolution, history, and dissidence*, are discursively addressed. On top of that it will summarise the observations made in this chapter where certain issues of Granma were highlighted, corresponding to key events in this period, like the 1994 'Maleconazo' episode or the diplomatic conflict around the repatriation of the juvenile Cuban refugee Elián González. Lastly, this section summarises the content, truths and tone of the discourse, shines light on discursive strategies that are used and offers an observation on the process of discursive legitimisation.

When it comes to the state's president, Fidel Castro, it stands out that he rather speaks in Granma than that he is spoken about. Granma in the special period is full of interviews, speeches, anecdotes (and photos) of Fidel Castro. Fidel Castro is portrayed as a source of truth and guidance. The rest of the discourse – when Fidel does not directly speak himself – follows the same logic and truth and uses the same terms and tone, many times with reference to Fidel. Thus, *in the 1990s Fidel Castro constitutes the form, tone, and content of the Cuban state discourse*. The tone in general in the special period is hopeful and positive with a positive outlook towards the future and faith in the future generations, that are granted the ability to shape a new socialism and continue the revolution<sup>111</sup>. In the final years of the 1990s the concept of 'Battle of Ideas' was introduced as a legitimising factor stating that there is openness for other perspectives and appreciation for critical thinking. However, with Bernard I agreed that it was a mere ideological campaign<sup>112</sup> that aimed on implementing the truths and values of the revolution on the younger generation for them to continue the project of the revolution.

The United States is the clear enemy in Cuban state discourse and clearly is 'the Other'. Cuban identity, ideology and morality are defined in opposition to those of the US. We have seen that some words used to describe the US are 'yanks', 'criminal', 'enemy', and 'stupid'. It is too much to conclude that the Cuban state discourse in the special period is characterised best as an attack on the US. Attacking US policy, like the embargo on Cuba, is

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<sup>111</sup> Sara Más, "Felicitó el Comandante en Jefe a Estudiantes de la FEEM, Clausuró Raúl el 9no. Congreso Estudiantil", *Granma*, December 7, 1995, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Bernard "Patria o Muerte," 1.

not that omnipresent in 1990's discourse, but when there is an occasion, as we have seen with the international conflict on the boy Elián, it is used to morally position Cuba vis-à-vis to the US. The US embargo itself is only addressed seldomly as a direct cause of the 1990's economic crisis but is rather described to complicate Cuba's economy.

The achievements of the revolution, like safety, free health care and education are highlighted more than before<sup>113</sup>. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, communism and Comecon could still be addressed as a form of legitimacy. In 1990s discourse the achievement of the revolution that is dominant is agricultural reform or increase in agricultural production. This is logical in the light of a food crisis (it can give the Cuban people a perspective out of the food crisis), but it is also addressed more generically as being one of the pillars of socialism. The achievements of the revolution are addressed and used to legitimise the continuation of the state's revolutionary project, which for example became clear in the discussed article on poverty in Latin America.

When history is addressed in the Cuban state 1990s discourse, Cuba's wars of independence were often the point of reference. History is mobilised in the form of remembrance of historical events and historical figures that shaped Cuban history and storytelling on things surrounding these events or figures, like José Martí and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.

The last category is that of *protest/dissidence*. Protesters in the 1994 'Maleconazo' episode are mainly described as being anti-patriotic<sup>114</sup>. Combining this with the fact that historical figures were described as patriotic, is a clear example of the moral and logical lines that the discourse follows. It is a clear example of the consistency and coherency of the discourse. Further, the protests were 'othered' in the same way and with the same terms as the United States. The protesters were described as perpetrators of the Cuban revolution, which carries the load of high treason. The provocations and provocateurs are put in a negative light by stating that they were directly funded by the US, which makes the US responsible for the protests itself and it puts the protesters in the same moral category as the US. This associates the protesters with the US, which excludes them from the state's project. Sharply, Port observed that the hijackers and rioters are used as an 'instrument of

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<sup>113</sup> This concludes Port. With 'before' he means the 1980s discourse before the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. Port, "*Hegemonic Discourse*," 157.

<sup>114</sup> Note that anti-patriotic is different from non-patriotic.

imperial (US) aggression<sup>115</sup> in the discourse.

Next to main themes, there are some strategies in legitimising claims extracted from the discourse. We have seen the strategy of comparing Cuba's crisis to others in Latin America. Another strategy is that of over- or understatement. The 'special period' serves as an example as it is a euphemism denoting a period of severe economic crisis with the term 'special'. Another example, as we have seen in the Elián González example, is the use of diminutives to evoke sympathy.

What follows in the rest of this thesis is a discourse analysis of the second crisis period, namely the period after the official resignation of Raúl Castro as president of Cuba, causing an end to the Castro era in Cuba. The post-Castro era can as well as the 'special period' be seen as a crisis period. This time due to tightening of the Embargo in 2019 and loss of income from tourism due to travel restriction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The post-Castro Granma's the same themes will be analysed and there might be some additional. This thesis will end with a comparison of the two time periods.

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<sup>115</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 157.

## Chapter 3: The post-Castro era (2018-Present)

The Castro-era officially came to an end in 2018, when Raúl Castro stepped down as president of Cuba. He did however continue to serve as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. Thus, *de facto* he stayed in charge until 2021, as he retained oversight over the new president. In 2021 Raúl retired from all political positions. Hence in 2021 the Castro era truly ended after a gradual transition of power.

Before Raúl, Fidel Castro had served as the head of the Cuban state since its 1959 Revolution. Fidel is seen as the embodiment of the Cuban revolution and Cuban culture since the Revolution. Fidel Castro stepped down in 2008 due to health issues. In 2016 he passed away. In 2018, Raúl Castro was succeeded by Miguel Díaz-Canel. For the first time in 59 years, Cuba had a head of state who had not fought in the Revolution. This was possibly one of the main elements that resulted in an identity crisis for the Cuban state and a crisis in its legitimacy. Seeing if there is evidence to be found in *Granma* for the possible blow to the state's legitimacy after the Castro era (2018-present) is one of the goals of this chapter. Without a Castro as head of the Cuban government, Cuba is said to face the greatest political challenge since the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>116</sup>.

Next to domestic political shifts and policy changes during the 2010s decade<sup>117</sup>, there were some other developments and events that shaped Cuban social reality and its economy in these years. One of them is the election of Republican Donald Trump at the other side of the Gulf of Mexico. Trump undid all that his predecessor Obama had done towards a better relationship between Cuba and the US. Obama visited Cuba in 2016 and shook hands with Raúl Castro as the first American president since the Revolution. The rapprochement between Cuba and the US during the Obama administration was reversed by Trump. He did not only undo some laws that had 'relaxed' the US embargo on Cuba, but he even tightened them by for example banning cruises to arrive at the island in June 2019. This caused a massive blow to Cuba's economy, because tourism has been Cuba's primary source of income since the 1990s. A year later, when the COVID-19 pandemic reached the

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<sup>116</sup> William M. LeoGrande, "Cuba's Perilous Political Transition to the Post-Castro Era," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 2 (April 2015): Abstract, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X15000103>.

<sup>117</sup> Raúl Castro started 4 major transitions: a restructuring of elite decision-making, a transformation of Cuba's centrally planned economy into a market socialist economy, a relaxation of tight social control, and a transition from the founding generation of the political elite (*los históricos*) to a successor generation. See: LeoGrande, "Cuba's Perilous," Abstract.

island and travel restrictions caused a complete halt to tourism, the economic situation in Cuba worsened quickly. Shortages arose that are by some said to be worse than during the special period. Social dissatisfaction grew in Cuba, exemplified by the rise the 'San Isidro Movement'<sup>118</sup>, a group that openly contested laws of the Cuban state. Social dissatisfaction also resulted in the largest protests Cuba has seen since the Revolution<sup>119</sup>.

The causes to the economic downfall are less clear than in the 1990s, when only one cause was addressed: the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now there were multiple: domestic policies, the US embargo and COVID-19 travel restrictions. Dissatisfaction was not only growing on economic policies, but also concerning animal protection, gay rights and freedom of speech and artistic expression.

The *Granma* newspapers surrounding these developments and events will be analysed in this chapter. This chapter will first cover the changes and discourse surrounding the new constitution in 2019 as well as the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the city of Havana. Then, this chapter will delve into the discourse surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic with special attention to the rise of the San Isidro Movement. Thirdly, this chapter will cover the 2021 protests and analyse the discursive reaction on them from the Cuban state. This chapter closes by conclusions and observations on the Cuban state discourse during the post-Castro era with main attention to the 5 themes.

### **3.1. A new Constitution and Havana's 500th Anniversary**

On February 2019 Cubans could vote in favour or against a new constitution in the form of a referendum. The new constitution is said to be a continuation of the project of socialism and holds fast to its Communist ideology<sup>120</sup>. The Cuban state actively campaigned for voting in favour for months before the election day. In government buildings, large posters

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<sup>118</sup> The San Isidro Movement consists of a group of artists, intellectuals, academics, and journalists, that do not necessarily oppose the Cuban government in general but protest the government's censorship of artistic expression. Their protests have resulted in multiple arrests and prison sentences. Therefore, the movement quickly grew to be more active. Initially, the group formed as a reaction to 'Decreto 349', which is a law that states that every creative activity must be legitimised by the Cuban ministry of culture before published. See: Ted A. Henken, "Del Movimiento San Isidro a 'Patria y Vida': ¿Quién Controlará la Revolución Digital Cubana?" *Revista Foro Cubano (RFC)* 2, no. 2 (January-June 2021): 75-77, <https://doi.org/10.22518/jour.rfc/2021.2a07>.

<sup>119</sup> Segrera, "Cuba," 37-38.

<sup>120</sup> The Lancet [author not mentioned], "Post-Castro Cuba: new constitution expands health rights," *The Lancet*, April 13, 2019, 1477.

were hung with the texts stating, "yes to the new constitution, is yes to socialism and Cuba"<sup>121</sup>. The simple phrase "I vote yes"<sup>122</sup> was displayed at the back of buses in Havana. In the state's newspaper the day before the election the new constitution was described as a step forward and a decisive moment in the history of Cuba. Here, it was not described as a *new* constitution but a *ratification*<sup>123</sup> of the existing constitution in place: "On 24 February, in the Referendum to ratify the Constitution, Cuba will be touching a decisive point of the 150 years we have celebrated and the 60 years of the Cuban Revolution, the Revolution of Fidel and Raúl (...)"<sup>124</sup>.

What is interesting in the excerpt is that history is mobilised. Next to a reference to the 60 years of the revolution, there is a reference to a historical point 150 years ago, from where 'celebration' started. This does not refer to Cuba's independence from Spain (1898), but it refers to the end of Ten Years' War, when Cuba had not gained its independence yet, but all were to live free in Cuba by the abolishment of slavery, which was safeguarded in Cuba's first constitution. This shows from the analysis of the actual 2019 Constitution: "one hundred and fifty years after our first Mambí Constitution, approved in Guáimaro on April 10, 1869"<sup>125</sup>. The constitution, and specifically the Preamble paint a good image of how Cuba envisions its own identity, morality, and ideology and how these are discursively described. It is full of the strong discourse that we have described as 'revolutionary discourse'. A phrase that stands out is "independent, sovereign, and democratic homeland"<sup>126</sup>, because from Western perspective it might be hard to image how a one-party-state can be envisioned as democratic. It also guarantees the sole existence of the Communist Party of Cuba in the 5<sup>th</sup> article.

Even though reference to the Ten Year's War (and the other wars of independence) is not explicitly done in communist terms i.e., is not addressed as a starting point of

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<sup>121</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Sí al nuevo constitución es sí al socialismo".

<sup>122</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Yo voto sí". See: "El Gobierno Cubano Arrecia su Campaña Por el Sí a la Constitución en los Ómnibus," CiberCuba, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.cibercuba.com/videos/noticias/2019-02-18-u1-e129488-s27061-gobierno-cubano-arrecia-su-campana-si-constitucion>.

<sup>123</sup> Bernard "Patria o Muerte," 1.

<sup>124</sup> Originally in Spanish: "El 24 de febrero, en el Referendo para ratificar la Constitución, Cuba estará tocando un punto culminante de los 150 años que hemos celebrado y los 60 de la Revolución Cubana, la Revolución de Fidel y Raúl (...)." Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, "No Claudicaremos Ni Traicionaremos, y Jamás Nos Rendiremos", *Granma*, February 23, 2019, 1. <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-02-23>.

<sup>125</sup> "In-Force Constitution Available on Constitute, Cuba 2019," Constitute, PDF generated Augustus 26, 2021, Preamble, [https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Cuba\\_2019.pdf?lang=en](https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Cuba_2019.pdf?lang=en).

<sup>126</sup> Constitute, "Cuba 2019."

socialist ideals, the same terms are used to describe the fruits of both points in history, like 'freedom', 'independence' and 'patriotic'. The same goals were pursued, and the same moral valuations are present when referring to the Revolution as well as the wars of independence, without addressing the wars of independence as a predecessor or condition of possibility for the later Revolution.

From the excerpt it must be noted that, when it comes to the mobilisation of history, there are two separate point in history wherfrom (historical) continuity is addressed: the 1959 Revolution and the 1869 constitution. This makes sense in the context of the constitution but is also remarkable because these two historical reference points are divided by a period of American Imperialism in Cuba, seen as a rupture in the development towards freedom and independence. That history can be pictured as continuity was defined by Zerubavel, who argues that such a sense of continuity does not say so much about reality itself but works to create a mental mode of how the past and present is perceived<sup>127</sup>. That historical continuity can also be used as a strategy to legitimise power is something that I would like to add here, as demonstrated by the excerpt.

The second interesting element in the excerpt from *Granma* is that the constitution is not said to be new, but a 'ratification'. The argument that is concerns a ratification adheres to observation by Gioioso and Pita that it is a discursive update<sup>128</sup>, and that the language of the former 1976 constitution is antiquated<sup>129</sup>. In line with this, Carranza claims that the revolution must make a new pact with every generation. Only the principles are permanent: national sovereignty, social justice, and economic and democratic development. Everything else is subject to debate, change, progress, and openness<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>127</sup> Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 46-48. See also: Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts Versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory," *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 2015): 125-142, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015596014>. Molden argues that "politics of history and memory in any society are determined by the relations of forces between hegemonic master narratives, defiant counter-memories, and silent majorities whose historical experience is rarely articulated in public".

<sup>128</sup> Vladimir Pita Simón, Richard N. Gioioso. "Estado de Derecho y Socialismo en Cuba: un Análisis Desde la Reforma Constitucional del 2019," *Latin American Law Review*, no. 08 (February 2022): 39-55, <https://doi.org/10.29263/lar08.2022.03>.

<sup>129</sup> The Lancet [author not mentioned], "Post-Castro Cuba: new constitution expands health rights," *The Lancet*, April 13, 2019, 1477.

<sup>130</sup> Julio Carranza, "La Revolución, El Socialismo Y El Consenso De La Juventud Cubana Hoy," *El Siglo*, August 3, 2021, <https://elsiglo.cl/2021/08/03/la-revolucion-el-socialismo-y-el-consenso-de-la-juventud-cubana-hoy/>.

Thus, the revolution needs to be safeguarded: "driven by Raúl Castro, keen to institutionalise the revolutionary precepts in the absence of strong figureheads"<sup>131</sup>. Safeguarding the revolution in this way by institutionalising and constitutionalising revolutionary ideas and policies is somehow comparable to the aim of the 'battle of ideas': reinforcing revolutionary ideology and younger generations as it both seems a *reaffirmation* of power, just as power must be legitimised (discursively) to maintain in place<sup>132</sup>. It appears that in the 1990s as well as in the post-Castro era there was a need in doing so. The difference is that in the 1990s it was still sufficient doing so discursively as in the post-Castro era it had to be done through a ratification of the constitution, safeguarding the revolutionary ideals and sole existence of the Communist Party.

The third interesting element in the excerpt is that the revolution is said to be 'Revolution of Fidel and Raúl'. In 1990s uniting discourse you would more commonly read that the revolution is of all Cuban people. There appears to be a need to refer to Fidel (and Raúl) to state the legitimacy of the revolution and its continuity. This is a visible development in post-Castro era discourse: an increase in references to Fidel Castro. Referencing Fidel now might have a uniting function. The discourse (the government's campaign) surrounding the new constitution 'worked', as the result of the referendum was that nearly 90% (88.95% to be exact) voted in favour<sup>133</sup>.

Next to a reaffirmation of power, policy changes were implemented. The main one was the official recognition of the ownership of private property<sup>134</sup>. This, in combination with laws implemented in the same year that decreased the quantity of food products that could be obtained subsidised with Cuba's 'Libreta' (coupon book, rationed food) and the opening of many 'dollar stores', where only Cubans that have access to foreign currency can buy products (causing a division in Cuban society), has moved away from socialist/communist ideology or society. Where the Cuban state claims that socialism is continued or legitimises its projects continuation under the title of socialism it implements

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<sup>131</sup> The Lancet, "Post-Castro Cuba," 1477.

<sup>132</sup> Ruibal, "Legitimacy", 1.

<sup>133</sup> The Lancet, "Post-Castro Cuba," 1477. In addition: there is doubt whether the referendum results are true.

<sup>134</sup> Laws that recognise private property as well as owning a private business were already in place since 2008 when Raúl took over presidency from Fidel Castro, but now they are recognised formally by the constitution. See: Renee Monzon, "Introducing Private-Property Rights to Cuba: How Cuba's New Constitution Paves the Way for Economic Growth," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 52, no. 1 (2020): 629, <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol52/iss1/28.629>. See also: Bye, *Cuba*, Foreword.

measures that move away from socialism. There is a discrepancy between social context<sup>135</sup> and discursive content, which might influence the functions of the legitimising claims when it is 'noticed' that they only partly correspond<sup>136</sup> with the social context.

When observing the *Granma* newspapers from this period of social and policy reform after the 2019 constitution, it stands out that the tone in *Granma* is getting more forceful. *Granma* does not report that much on domestic policy reform. Where in the 1990s the discourse turned inward, it seems that in the post-Castro era, the causes for domestic problems are solely placed externally and the enemies considered to be causing instability in Cuba are described with more aggressive language than before: "The NATO, the CIA, and Operation Gladio: 70 years of terrorism"<sup>137</sup>. Next to the enemy already present in 1990s discourse, namely the US, there appears another enemy for the Cuban state: NATO. Besides, the tone has become more aggressive. Where in the 1990s the enemy, the US, and the US blockade, were described with terms like 'criminal', 'yankee', 'unsensitive' or 'unjust'. Now words like 'terrorism' appear in *Granma*. These terms you would not read in the more diplomatic 1990s *Granma* discourse. It is true that in this context the aggressive term is used rather to denote secret operations as the CIA and operation Gladio<sup>138</sup> and not the US or the US embargo in general. However, this is not the only example of an increase of aggressive words to describe enemy forces. Another term that appears in *Granma* and was not part of 1990s discourse is the term 'genocide'<sup>139</sup>. In *Granma* this term is used to describe the US embargo: "Why don't they have the courage to open the blockade, what legal, moral basis sustains that a foreign government can apply such a policy to a small

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<sup>135</sup> I use the term social context here instead of social reality because speaking about 'social reality' is complicated or even problematic in the light theoretical framework of this research, because we have stated that social reality is formed by discourse and it's not just something 'out there' underlying discourse.

<sup>136</sup> Also 'correspond' is problematic in this context (see last footnote).

<sup>137</sup> Originally in Spanish: "La OTAN, la CIA y la Operación Gladio: 70 años de terrorismo". Jorge Wejbebe Cobo, "La Otan, La Cia Y La Operación Gladio: 70 Años De Terrorismo," *Granma*, Apr 9, 2019, 6, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-04-09>.

<sup>138</sup> Operation Gladio was a secret operation that started in 1952 in Italy to organise resistance in the event of a communist takeover. The project was sponsored by the CIA and NATO.

<sup>139</sup> See for example: (1) Miguel Díaz- Canel Bermúdez, "La Habana, Ciudad De Paz Y De La Dignidad," *Granma*, November 18, 2019, 2, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-11-18>, (2) Julio Martínez, Juan A. Borrego, Freddy Pérez, Ronald Suárez, Eduardo Palomares, Miguel Febles, and Mailenys Oliva, "Cubanos, en Toda la Nación, Al Llamado de la Patria y de su Presidente." *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 6, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>, and (3) Gladys Ramos and Juan d. Nusa, "A la Revolución la Defendemos Ante Todo", *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 2, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>.

country, and during such adverse situations? Isn't that genocide?"<sup>140</sup>. The US embargo is said to be the "longest genocide of all time"<sup>141</sup>. The term was not only expressed in *Granma*, but the phrase was also present throughout Havana on big billboards. There is an increase of aggressive description describing enemy forces. This can point at a state that aims to legitimise its morality in opposition to the enemy's or a state that feels threatened.

Another development in *Granma* in the post-Castro era is the emergence and increase of argumentative language in news articles when it comes to ideology. Of course, arguments are made throughout the state discourse. You could even say any legitimising claim contains an argument. It is however novel that it happens explicitly (on ideology) and that an article is structured like an argument. An example of this is an argument made against "missionaries who preach the restauration of capitalism in Cuba"<sup>142</sup>. The article makes a clear and structured argument on why socialism is better than capitalism, by for example stating that the wealth of capitalist countries has its origin in slavery. It must be noted that this is a novelty in Cuban state discourse and that it gives the impression that socialism is contested. It gives the impression that the truth that socialism is good and uncontested is less self-evident as before in for example the 1990s. The article explicitly states that there is a group consisting of "real or virtual missionaries"<sup>143</sup> that preach capitalism as a solution for Cuba. This discourse reflects that there are entering other 'truths' in the Cuban state discourse, namely that of another moral appreciation of capitalism. The Cuban state attacks these truths. This could be a sign that the Cuban state is losing its hegemony over the construction of truth. The emergence of alternative discourses is reflected in *Granma*. It is something that the state discursively must deal with.

Contesting certain aspects of the Cuban government policies (or even ideology) continued throughout 2019. At the end of 2019, Cuba was to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its capital Havana. In the discourse surrounding the celebration nationalism

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<sup>140</sup> Originally in Spanish: "¿Por qué no tienen valor para abrir el bloqueo, qué fundamento legal, moral, sostiene que un gobierno extranjero le pueda aplicar esa política a un país pequeño, y en medio de situaciones tan ad- versas? ¿Eso no es genocidio?". Gladys and Nusa, "A la Revolución," 2.

<sup>141</sup> Pedro Ríoseco, "El Bloqueo De 60 Años a Cuba, El Genocidio Más Prolongado De La Historia." *Granma*, February 3, 2022, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/cuba/2022-02-03/el-bloqueo-de-60-anos-a-cuba-el-genocidio-mas-prolongado-de-la-historia-03-02-2022-12-02-15>.

<sup>142</sup> Originally in Spanish: 'Los misioneros que predicen la restauración capitalista en Cuba. Abel Prieto, "Los Misioneros Que Predican La Restauración Capitalista En Cuba," *Granma*, April 8, 2019, 4, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-04-08>.

<sup>143</sup> Originally in Spanish: '...misioneros reales o virtuel'. Prieto, "Los Misioneros," 4.

continued as in the 1990s. The *Granma* newspapers surrounding the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Havana is filled with articles that address all the uniting forces that Cubans can be proud of with special reference to its capital as for example its architecture<sup>144</sup>. Next to mentioning the achievements in architecture, history is mobilised throughout the *Granma*'s in these days. But more interesting is that there is another article wherein socialism is defended. This time not that argumentative, but an article that covers a speech of the country's president the day before in Guantanamo, wherein he stated: "The Cuban people will leave no room for fractures or interference.... We will not cease in defending and perfectionating of our socialism, despite the blockade, which is intensifying as much as the campaign to discredit the social work of our doctors"<sup>145</sup>.

This quote is illustrative for another discursive development in the post-Castro era, namely that the US blockade is emphasised and mentioned in a wide variety of contexts. What stand out here is that the US embargo is written between 2 commas in an article that does not necessarily covers the US embargo. The embargo is introduced into a sentence about defending socialism and the social work of Cuban doctors. Thus, implying that things that are under attack in Cuba are directly or indirectly under attack by or due to the blockade. Writing '*, because of the blockade*', between commas in divergent contexts gives the impression if the blockade is 'added' or as if the opportunity is granted to mention the blockade. This turns out to be an omnipresent phenomenon in the post-Castro era<sup>146</sup>.

Surrounding the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Havana there were other events of dissatisfaction or contestation. It was for example critiqued that when unveiling Havana's capitol, its former government building, that had been under restoration for

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<sup>144</sup> See: Abel Reyes Montero, "Ya Cumplés 500 Años, Habana Mía." *Granma*, November 16, 2019, 2, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-11-16>.

<sup>145</sup> José Llamos Camejo, "Díaz-Canel: El Pueblo Cubano no Va a Dejar Espacio a Fracturas Ni a Injerencias," *Granma*, November 16, 2019, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-11-16>.

<sup>146</sup> As found in: (1) Susana Antón Rodríguez, "Servicio De Paquetería En Cuba: Que Sean Más Las Soluciones Que Los Problemas," *Granma*, May 13, 2021, 5, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-05-13>, (2) Karima Oliva Bello, "Hagámosles Frente a Las Campañas En Lugar De Servirlas," *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 8, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>, (3) Yaima Puig, René Tamayo, and Alina Perera, "En 2022 Avanzaremos Gradualmente En La Eliminación De La Inflación; no Será Fácil, Pero Tampoco Imposible," *Granma*, December 18, 2021, 6, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-12-18>, (4) Michel E. Torres Corona, "Déjà Vu: Hagamos Que 2022 no Resulte Ser Una Fatídica Copia Del Año Que Acabamos De Despedir," *Granma*, January 1, 2022, 3, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2022-01-01>, (5) Ernesto Estevez Rams, "La Estafa." *Granma*, January 10, 2022, 8, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2022-01-10>, (6) Nuria Barbosa León, "Morena, Un Partido Articulador En La Región," *Granma*, March 18, 2022, 8, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2022-03-18>.

longer than a decade, the top was fully made of gold. Many people critiqued the government's grandeur for being misplaced, as day-to-day life for many Cubans was a struggle to get enough food on the table. In the days before the celebrations, some riots occurred in the street of Havana, where government workers captured and transported stray dogs from the city's streets to paint a clean image for the international press. People tried to stop government officials from capturing the dogs, as for many the faith of the stray dogs was clear. The state reacted implicitly to these riots in an article addressing an official statement of the ministry of agriculture. Animal protection is described as a "topic that has generated a lot of worries and fundamental debate on social media"<sup>147</sup>. Here, the Cuban state seems to acknowledge the existing worries. Again, alternative discourses are reflected in the state discourse.

The choice of addressing 'social media' and not saying that it is a fundamental debate under Cubans discredits the critique to a certain level, because social media has a negative connotation within the state discourse. What also discredits the critique from the corner of the animal activists is that the article states that there are "multiple opinions on the protection of animals"<sup>148</sup>. The article never says that the government will admit legislation for animal protection but places the 'problem' in a broader context, namely that of the environment "...the state's obligation to protect and conserve a sane environment"<sup>149</sup>. Within this broader context the Cuban state can legitimise its reaction to the riots and achievements of the revolution when it comes to health care: "In Cuba, there is a disease surveillance, prevention, and control programme, which has made it possible to maintain low morbidity rates associated with rabies, leptospirosis, and toxoplasmosis, among others"<sup>150</sup>. This illustrates that, next to using opportunities to include the blockade, the state also does so for mentioning the achievements of the revolution.

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<sup>147</sup> Originally in Spanish: "tema que ha generado preocupación y debate fundamentalmente en las redes sociales". *Granma* [author not mentioned], "Ministerio De La Agricultura Se Pronuncia Sobre La Protección Y Cuidado De Animales En Cuba," *Granma*, November 16, 2019, 3, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2019-11-16>.

<sup>148</sup> Originally in Spanish: "... se generaron múltiples opiniones acerca de la protección y cuidado de los animales". *Granma*, "Ministerio," 3.

<sup>149</sup> Originally in Spanish: "... se reforzó la obligación del Estado con la protección y conservación de un medioambiente sano". *Granma*, "Ministerio," 3.

<sup>150</sup> Originally in Spanish: "En Cuba existe un programa de vigilancia, prevención y control de enfermedades, que ha permitido mantener bajas tasas de morbilidad asociadas a la rabia, leptospirosis, toxoplasmosis, entre otras". *Granma*, "Ministerio," 3.

### 3.2. The San Isidro Movement and the Impact of COVID-19

The events surrounding the rise of the San Isidro Movement can be seen as decisive moments in the post-Castro era when it comes to the contestation of state power. It is the first time that the Cuban state power itself is contested as openly and organised, as by The San Isidro Movement. It may also be the first time Cuban state power itself is contested at all. We have concluded that in the 1990s there were no or limited signs of contestation visible in Cuban society, nor were there signs of problems in the process of discursive legitimisation *Granma*'s discourse.

The San Isidro Movement consists of a group of artists, intellectuals, academics, and journalists, who initially protested the government's repressive censorship of artistic expression in Cuba. The movement quickly grew to become more active, intense, and organised. Initially, the group formed as a reaction to 'Decreto 349'<sup>151</sup>, a law criminalising artistic expression and publication that is not authorised by the Cuban state. The San Isidro Movement began as a small group of activists that did not gain much attention domestically nor internationally until November 2020. At that time, rapper Denis Solis live-streamed himself getting arrested by the police and the video went viral on social media. Solis got an eight-month prison sentence for insulting a police officer. The Movement protested its member's arrest by locking themselves up in the house of a member residing in the street 'San Isidro'. After a week of protest and hunger strike, the police forcefully entered the house and detained the protesters<sup>152</sup>. The raid was legitimised under reasons related to COVID-19<sup>153</sup>.

The reaction was a protest from the Movement and many supporters (over 100) outside of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. They were clear in what they wanted: 'a dialogue' with the government about freedom of expression. It led to a meeting between members of the group and the deputy minister of culture, Fernando Rojas, who promised improvement<sup>154</sup>, but Cuba's president later criticised Rojas' promises. In *Granma*'s discourse the San Isidro Movement became a new enemy: "San Isidro, an imperial reality

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<sup>151</sup> Henken, "Movimiento," 73.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>153</sup> In November 2020 it was still obligatory in Cuba to hospitalise with a COVID-19 infection. The raid was legitimised by stating that there was an infected person in the residency on San Isidro.

<sup>154</sup> Henken, "Movimiento," 78.

show act”<sup>155</sup>. With the knowledge that ‘imperial’ and ‘imperialism’ always refers to the US in Cuban state discourse, the San Isidro is set on the same foot with the enemy. The article goes on stating that ‘some’ (no estimation on how many) were yelling “Trump 2020!”<sup>156</sup> and claiming Trump as their president, evidently a disgrace in Cuba after Trump had tightened the embargo the year before. The article that reacted on San Isidro’s protest further states that “Trump did nearly everything to drown the Cuban people in misery while pretending to be helping them”<sup>157</sup>. On the contrary, the Cuban state is not to blame for the current crisis: “Cuba, however, managed the effects of the pandemic and the international economic crisis exemplary – and in an outpouring of humanism – it sent 53 medical brigades to poor and rich countries rich countries, created its own medicines, and tested its own vaccines, and left no one stranded”<sup>158</sup>.

This quote illustrates that the events surrounding San Isidro, contesting a specific law, and aiming to evoke a dialogue, are placed in a broader context: the context of the crisis in the post-Castro era. In this way the state can legitimise itself by emphasising on the achievements of the Cuban revolution and the effects of the US Embargo. The Cuban state is portrayed as a moral example, which makes an attack on its legitimacy even worse within this internal logic of the discourse. To further ‘attack’ the San Isidro Movement history is mobilised in the person of Cuba’s national hero José Martí: “These Cuban-born Trumpists are “(...) deserters who ask for a rifle in the armies of North America, which drowns its Indians [and its blacks] ... , in the words of José Martí”<sup>159</sup>. With the transportation of a quote by the national hero to a modern context, the San Isidro Movement is placed on the same moral level as Americans that drowned Indians and blacks (‘and its blacks’ is added by *Granma*). That the Cuban state discourse gets more aggressive, and hostile, is a

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<sup>155</sup> Originally in Spanish: “San Isidro, un acto de reality show imperial”. Enrique Ubieta Gómez, “San Isidro, Un Acto De Reality Show Imperial,” *Granma*, November 30, 2020, Supplement 2, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2020-11-30>.

<sup>156</sup> Ubieta, “San Isidro,” Supplement 2.

<sup>157</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Como presidente hizo casi todo para ahogar al pueblo de Cuba y tuvo el cinismo de decir que lo ayudaba”. Ubieta, “San Isidro,” Supplement 2.

<sup>158</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Cuba, sin embargo, gestionó ejemplarmente los efectos de la pandemia y de la crisis económica internacional y en un derroche de humanismo envió 53 brigadas médicas a países pobres y a países ricos, creó sus medicamentos y ensaya sus propias vacunas, amortiguó los cuantiosos daños de las intensas lluvias... y no dejó a nadie desamparado”. Ubieta, “San Isidro,” Supplement 2.

<sup>159</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Esos trumpistas nacidos en Cuba son «¡(...) desertores que piden fusil en los ejércitos de la América del Norte, que ahoga en sangre a sus indios [y a sus negros], ... , en palabras de José Martí””. Ubieta, “San Isidro,” Supplement 2.

development that is confirmed once again. The returning reference to Trump is interesting, as it is not used to exemplify everything that has to do with the US, but ‘Trumpism’ is pictured as the highest of evil that the US (and Cuba) has to offer. ‘Trump’ first and foremost got a negative connotation when he tightened the US embargo on Cuba in 2019. Thus, calling members of the San Isidro Movement ‘Trumpists’ can be imagined forming public opinion to a great extent.

On the front page of the same issue of *Granma* a counter protest by the Cuban revolutionaries, including its president, is addressed: “The people are in the streets in defence of their Revolution”<sup>160</sup>. Interesting is that the word dialogue is omnipresent (12 occurrences) in this issue of *Granma* in different contexts, knowing that a dialogue was explicitly what the San Isidro Movement was asking for. After the deputy minister of culture promised a more open dialogue, Cuba’s president claimed: “President Miguel Díaz-Canel ‘ratified’ that in Cuba there is room for dialogue for everything that is *in support of socialism*, for everything that is *in support of the Revolution*”<sup>161</sup>. The first observation is that apparently the dialogue is not for everyone nor for every idea, but only for the people in support of socialism and the revolution. Logically, it follows that the dialogue that the San Isidro Movement wants is not in support of socialism but attacks it. Therefore, they are excluded from the dialogue. It feels paradoxical to claim that the dialogue is one of the pillars of the revolution – that there should be a battle of ideas<sup>162</sup> – but other perspectives or ideas are excluded from the dialogue as a precaution. This is supported by the fact that there are many instances reported of the Cuban government blocking internet access for a period in moments of possible spreading of conflicting ideas. This for example occurred multiple times during the San Isidro protests<sup>163</sup> under the legitimisation of banning fake news. Fake news is a term present in the Cuban state discourse. On the one hand it refers to all news coming from the US, and on the other to all news that is not in line with the dominant ideology.

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<sup>160</sup> Originally in Spanish: “El pueblo está en la calle en defensa de su Revolución”. Nuria Barbosa León, Alfredo Herrera Sánchez, “El Pueblo Está En La Calle En Defensa De Su Revolución” *Granma*, November 30, 2020, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2020-11-30>.

<sup>161</sup> Originally in Spanish: “El Presidente ... ratificó que en Cuba hay espacio de diálogo para todo lo que sea por el socialismo, para todo lo que sea por la Revolución”. Barbosa and Herrera, “El Pueblo,” 1.

<sup>162</sup> Bernard, “*Patria o Muerte*,” 1.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Abstract.

<sup>163</sup> Henken, “Movimiento,” 76.

The conclusion from the 1990s concept of the ‘battle of ideas’ was that there was no freedom of ideas, but that the concept was used for means of legitimacy. This is confirmed from a first-hand source in the form of a speech of Cuba’s president, wherein he states that there is only room for ideas in support of the state’s ideology. That this is explicitly expressed in the post-Castro era, turns the paradox into an inconsistency within the Cuban state discourse, because now the Cuban state openly undermines one of their legitimising pillars, where in the 1990s this was done so only implicitly.

Another thing that stands out in the article is that when the president is quoted, he is said to ‘ratify’, instead of ‘say’ things. This is interesting and not limited to this sole occurrence. In the post-Castro era, the president is nearly always said to ‘ratify’<sup>164</sup>, ‘reaffirm’<sup>165</sup> or ‘confirm’<sup>166</sup> things. In articles describing speeches by the president or by other senior government officials in the 1990s, the terms ‘declare’<sup>167</sup>, ‘summarise’<sup>168</sup>, ‘affirm’<sup>169</sup> or ‘say’<sup>170</sup> were more commonly used. The terms used after 2018 give the impression that in the post-Castro era that there is a *reproduction* of truth instead of *production* of it i.e., that there is a truth out there already constructed that ought to be constantly reaffirmed and repeated. It also gives the impression that the ability to construct truth is only ascribed to Fidel Castro and not to the new president.

In the same issue of *Granma* wherein the president ‘ratified’ that only ideas in ascribing to the dominant ideology are welcome, the Cuban state claims that “those who have designed the San Isidro Farce, have directed it at the wrong country”<sup>171</sup>. As the article continues it becomes clear that the Cuban state claims that San Isidro’s discontent should

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<sup>164</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘ratificó’ (ratificar). Barbosa and Herrara, “El Pueblo,” 1.

<sup>165</sup> Originally in Spanish ‘reafirmó’ (reaffirmar). Martínez, Borrego, Pérez, Suárez, Palomares, Febles and Oliva, “Cubanos,” 6.

<sup>166</sup> Originally in Spanish ‘confirmó’ (confirmar). René Tamayo León, “Cuba Seguirá Siendo Un Destino De Turismo De Paz,” *Granma*, November 16, 2021, 8, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-11-16>.

<sup>167</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘declaró’ (declarar). Félix Pita Astudillo, “Condiciones Humillantes En Viajes EE.UU.-Cuba,” *Granma*, November 8, 1995, 3.

<sup>168</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘resumió’ (resumir). Susana Lee, “Nuestra Batalla Es Que La Empresa Estatal Produzca Más Y Sea Cada Vez Más Eficiente,” *Granma*, May 9, 1995, 3.

<sup>169</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘affirmó’ (affirmar). Lee, “Nuestra Batalla,” 3.

<sup>170</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘dijo’ (decir). De Jesús, “Nuestro Pueblo,” 1.

<sup>171</sup> Originally: “Quienes diseñaron la farsa de San Isidro se equivocaron de país”. Yisell Rodríguez Milán, “Quienes Diseñaron La Farsa De San Isidro Se Equivocaron De País,” *Granma*, November 30, 2020, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2020-11-30>. The word farce denotes a dramatic act or event that is unorganised. The use of this word is interesting for it being the first organised, open, and critical contestation of the Cuban state’s project.

be directed at the US, because they are the real cause of the situation that Cuba is in. The US are also said to have funded<sup>172</sup> the San Isidro protests and to have orchestrated the protests to hurt Cuba<sup>173</sup>. Because of this the members of the San Isidro are portrayed as a muppet of the American imperialist forces and thus ignorant of reality.

The analysis above illustrates how in Granma the protests of the San Isidro movement are first and foremost portrayed as a provocation from the US. The words that are used to describe it are the same terms that are used when describing Cuba's enemy, the US. This follows the internal logic of the Cuban state discourse. Dissidents are more and more constructed as the enemy. The discourse excludes and creates dichotomies. In the 1990s protesters were also excluded discursively from the good project of the revolution, but it was not said that there was no place in the dialogue for people with other ideas as explicitly as now. In line with the theoretical observation that discourse structures reality, exclusive discourses have the potential of creating more dissidence or contestation. This can occur when people do not see themselves included in the state discourse anymore for having different ideas on political and social reality. It is not only discourse that has possibly contributed to increasing contestation and dissatisfaction. Also, the social context of a quickly worsening crisis in Cuba in 2020 and 2021 has. The next part of this chapter explores the economic and social situation in these years.

### **3.2.1 The 2021 Economic and Monetary Crisis**

In 2020 Cuba saw its economy decrease by nearly 11%<sup>174</sup>. The main cause for this was the halt to tourism due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Normally between 4 and 5 million tourists visit Cuba every year, but in 2020 Cuba only hosted around 80.000<sup>175</sup>. With tourism as Cuba's main source of income – and many Cubans working in the sector – it had dramatic effects on day-to-day life for many Cubans. Shortages arose that are by some said to be worse than in the special period. Social dissatisfaction grew under the Cuban people, which is not hard to imagine when there are lines outside of supermarkets – under police and military surveillance – that last for hours. Inflation and hyperinflation caused difficulties in

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<sup>172</sup> It is true that many Cuban young entrepreneurs and artists seek collaboration and funding for their projects in other countries for it is difficult to get funding from within Cuba.

<sup>173</sup> Rodríguez, "Quienes Diseñaron," 1.

<sup>174</sup> Burki, "Behind Cuba's," 466

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

buying basic products. The inflation was not only caused by a scarcity of products, but also by the instability of the Cuban Peso, that is pegged to the USD in the official state market (1 USD = 25 CUP), but freely fluctuates in the informal market (1 USD = 75-125 CUP). This imbalance caused prices to rise quickly, destabilised the economy and created inflation, because prices (in the informal market) followed the fluctuating value of the USD.

Even though food products are initially sold in government stores, due to the scarcity food became a resale product in the informal market. This situation has developed already in the early days of the pandemic and continues to worsen until today. It is unclear if the government aims on resolving the monetary instability soon. In 2021 they have been renegotiating their debts with the EU, which are expressed in Euro. If the Cuban state would decide to let its currency fluctuate and it will reach its 'real value', then the Cuban state debts would triple or quadruple instantly. That the Cuban state needs foreign currency is visible in the fact that it has opened many 'dollar stores', where only Cubans can buy products that have access to foreign currency. This has caused a division in Cuban society and is not in with the socialist ideology of equality. This context painted have all possibly contributed to a rising dissatisfaction in Cuba with the current situation. It became more visible that not only the US Embargo and COVID-19 has its effects on the Cuban economy, but also Cuba's domestic economic policy.

### **3.3. The 2021 Protests**

On 11 July 2021 thousands of Cubans took to the streets in the largest protest since the island's 1959 Revolution. They were triggered by a shortage of food and medicine, discontent with the government handling the COVID-19 pandemic and by legislation suppressing freedom of expression and speech. The protests were not organised but started by a handful of people in a small village just outside of the capital Havana<sup>176</sup>. The protests were able to spread rapidly to cities around the island for many protesters used social media to mobilise others. Already since 2018, when Raúl Castro stepped down as president, there had been an increasing social dissatisfaction with Cuban's current economic situation and its uncertain future, which contributed to the 2021 protests.

The morning after the protests, the Cuban state reacted discursively in *Granma*. Central in the issue of *Granma* is the fully reported monologue held by the president on the

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<sup>176</sup> Segrera, "Cuba," 37-38.

day of the protests, during a “special intervention from the palace of the Revolution”<sup>177</sup>. This subchapter intends to answer the question how the state has reacted discursively to the protests. In correspondence with the dominant themes, three things will be looked at specifically. The first is how the protesters are portrayed and described, the second is what is mentioned to have caused the protests, and the third is how the Cuban state still judges their power and policies to be justified even though there is apparent contestation.

Since Fidel Castro passed away in 2016, Cuba’s newspaper *Granma* has included a daily quote by him on its front page. This quote is often selected in response to the primary event of the day before or the primary article in the issue. In the issue of *Granma* the day after the protests the quote states that “the most important thing about a revolution is the ability to defend itself”<sup>178</sup>. Considering the events of the day before, it would imply that the revolution should be defended towards the signs of dissatisfaction. A second thing that stands out is that by the quote it is apparent that the ‘revolution’ is seen as something that is still going on in 2021. It is part of Cuban discourse that the revolution is an ongoing project. This is not completely in line with the common use of the term, as its definition mostly contains the elements ‘rapid’ and ‘change’. Thus, we have distinguished between the ‘Revolution’, as the sequence of events that brought change in 1953 to 1959, and the ‘revolution’ as the more complex process of building a socialist state since 1959. Where ‘revolution’ is normally used as ‘change’, the Cuban state uses the term to denote continuity since 1959. Knowing that ‘revolution’ has a positive connotation in Cuban state discourse, it thus can be seen as legitimising the current administration still carrying it on.

The continuity of the revolution is what needs to be defended, which is the theme throughout the issue of *Granma*. A quick search teaches us that in this issue of *Granma*, the verb defend (in any form) is used 23 times, half of them in combination with ‘revolution’. Other things that ought to be defended are ‘the streets’, ‘the liberty of the nation’ and ‘the independence of the people’<sup>179</sup>. Those are all seen to be at stake by the protests. The Cuban state also expresses its desire that Cubans should be willing to sacrifice everything they have, even blood, to defend the revolution: "...to defend the

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<sup>177</sup> Ramos and Nusa, “A la Revolución,” 2.

<sup>178</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Lo primero de una Revolución es su capacidad de defendérse a sí misma”. Fidel Castro Ruz, “Lo Primero De Una Revolución Es Su Capacidad De Defenderse a Sí Misma,” *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 2, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>.

<sup>179</sup> Originally in Spanish: ‘las calles’, ‘la independencia del pueblo’ and ‘la libertad de esta nación’. Martínez, Borrego, Pérez, Suárez, Palomares, Febles and Oliva, “Cubanos,” 6.

Cuban Revolution at whatever cost necessary, ready to give my blood and give the answer that those worms deserve"<sup>180</sup>. Here, 'at all costs' and 'ready to give blood' can be interpreted as an implicit call for violence against the protesters. The phrases may have the effect of mobilising people. Interesting in the quote is the reference to the protesters as 'worms' to paint the picture of the protesters as the lowest of all living creatures. But it is not just these 'worms' that attack the Cuban state and its revolution.

What is seen to be attacking the Cuban state becomes clear from the first words of the central article in *Granma*, which are 'The United States', is the context that "The US has molested the Cuban revolution greatly in the last 60 years"<sup>181</sup>. Through the article it becomes clear that the Cuban state confirms and clarifies that the causes of the protests were external, as the US is the sole cause of the economic problems in Cuba with its embargo restricting trade, tourism, and international financial transactions: "...they began to intensify a whole group of restrictive measures of the blockade; financial persecution, energy persecution, with the aim of asphyxiating the economy of our country"<sup>182</sup>. On top of that, the US has done this intentionally to provoke social upheaval against Cuba's government and are said to be directly funding the protests and giving orders to the protesters: "Only in the provincial capital, spurred on by the counterrevolution following orders from the United States,"<sup>183</sup>. In these examples a legitimising claim can be extracted: The Cuban state cannot be held accountable for the economic situation wherein the protests occurred.

That the protesters do stand up to their own government, is because they are 'confused' about the real causes of the economic hardship that they live in, which is the picture that *Granma* depicts of the protesters. This is exactly what the US wants: confuse Cuban citizens with their 'propaganda': "Díaz-Canel denounced their desire to provoke a massive social explosion in Cuba, to which all the propaganda and ideological constructions

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<sup>180</sup> Originally in Spanish: "...para defender a la Revolución Cubana al costo que sea necesario, dispuesta a dar hasta mi sangre y darle la respuesta que se merecen esos gusanos". Juan Diego Nusa Peñalver, Yudy Castro Morales, and Milagros Pichardo Pérez, "Por Cuba Habrá Que Darlo Todo," *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 4, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>.

<sup>181</sup> Originally in Spanish: "A Estados Unidos le ha molestado mucho durante 60 años el ejemplo de la Revolución Cubana". Ramos and Nusa, "A la Revolución," 2.

<sup>182</sup> Originally in Spanish: "...empezaron a recrudecer todo un grupo de medidas restrictivas del bloqueo; la persecución financiera, la persecución energética, con el objetivo de asfixiar la economía de nuestro país". Ramos and Nusa, "A la Revolución," 2.

<sup>183</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Solo en la capital provincial, azuzado por la contrarrevolución que sigue órdenes desde Estados Unidos...". Martínez, Borrego, Pérez, Suárez, Palomares, Febles and Oliva, "Cubanos," 6.

they have created to call for so-called humanitarian interventions, which end in military intervention and interference, crushing the rights, sovereignty and independence of all peoples, contribute”<sup>184</sup>. The term ‘confused’ was also present in the depiction of the protesters during the 2020 protest led by the San Isidro Movement.

Next to ‘confused’ and ‘worms’, the protesters were described as ‘counterrevolutionaries’, a term similarly applied to anything that has to do with the US. Putting the protesters in the same light as the US, forms the public opinion on the protesters, which is one of the main ways discourse functions. Another function of discourse that is visible is that of exclusion<sup>185</sup>. The protesters are excluded from the good project of the revolution. The protesters are also described with the term ‘mercenaries’<sup>186</sup> (there are 6 mentions of the term in the issue of *Granma*): "...from our National Capitol, to give a dignified response to a group of mercenaries, lunatics, and counterrevolutionaries, at the service of Yankee imperialism, who with hollow slogans of Liberty, and Homeland and Life, tried to alter the public order and heat up the streets this Sunday in the Cuban capital”<sup>187</sup>.

But the state goes further than merely describing the protesters with negative terms, as *Granma* claims that the protesters don’t want good health for their fellow Cubans: “Those who are encouraging demonstrations in Cuba do not want a good health system for Cuba, remember that their principles, their model, is the neoliberal model, it is

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<sup>184</sup> Originally in Spanish: “Díaz-Canel denunció ese anhelado deseo que tienen de que se provoque un estallido social masivo en Cuba, a lo que contribuyen toda esa propaganda y todas esas construcciones ideológicas que han hecho para convocar las llamadas intervenciones humanitarias, que terminan en intervenciones militares y en injerencias, que aplastan los derechos y la soberanía, la independencia de todos los pueblos”. Ramos and Nusa, “A la Revolución,” 2.

<sup>185</sup> Sarah Mills states, in line with Foucault’s original definition of discourse, that all views of discourse have one thing in common: “they consider discourses to be principally organised around practices of exclusion”. See: Mills, “Introduction”, 11.

<sup>186</sup> That the term ‘mercenaries’ has a negative connotation within the state discourse makes sense in the light of Cuba’s communist ideology. The terms obtained its current meaning during the ‘Bay of Pigs’: a failed invasion in 1961 by Cuban exiles residing in the US. The invasion aimed on reconquering Cuba 2 years after the Revolution. The exiles were called ‘mercenaries’ by the Cuban state not only because of their profession, but also to paint the picture that they would do anything for money, even invade their own country. See: Albert St. Clair, and Mercedes Tinoco, “La Invasión a Bahía De Cochinos, Cuba, Desde La Mirada De La Población De Bilwi, Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua,” *Ciencia e Interculturalidad* 7, no. 2 (2010): 10-18, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5377/rcl.v7i2.428>.

<sup>187</sup> Originally in Spanish: "...de nuestro Capitolio Nacional, para dar una digna respuesta a un grupúsculo de mercenarios, lumpens y contrarrevolucionarios, al servicio del imperialismo yanqui, que con huecas consignas de Libertad, y Patria y Vida, intentaron alterar el orden público y calentar las calles este domingo en la capital cubana”. Nusa, Castro and Pichardo, “Por Cuba,” 4.

the privatisation of services, it is the privatisation of medical services, it is the privatisation of education, it is that everyone should be saved as best they can; that those who have money should be able to go to the health system"<sup>188</sup>. 'Their' and 'they' here refers to the US as well as to the protesters. When it comes to the coherency of argument, there are some necessary steps lacking between 'the ones that were manifesting' and 'do not want the Cuban people to be in good health', as there have not been examples of protesters asking for privatisation of health care or education. But in the argument, another legitimising claim is visible, namely the emphasis on the achievements of the Cuban revolution. In this instance it refers to its good and free health care in opposition the US' health care system.

The discursive reaction from the Cuban state to the 2021 protests consists of legitimising claims that are mainly coherent, consistent and were already present in the Cuban state discourse in the crisis period of the 1990's. It follows the simple scheme revolution + Cuba = good and US + protesters = bad, which makes up the internal logic of the Cuban state discourse. To legitimise the Cuban state's ongoing project, the causes of the shortages and economic hardship, wherein the protests occurred, are solely ascribed to the US embargo and its restrictions. This is ascribed in a rather aggressive and intense tone with strong vocabulary. Next to an aggressive tone calling the protesters 'worms', the protesters were also depicted as 'confused', which gives the impression that the protesters may not completely and finally be excluded from the Cuban state's project, but there might be a possibility of 'unconfusing' them. I observe that describing protesters with 'confused' gives the impression of an insecure tone, especially when compared to the 1990s discourse.

### **3.3.1 The Need of Legitimacy in the Period Around the Protests**

In the period around the protests multiple articles are published in Granma that appear to have the sole purpose of legitimisation. Multiple 'truths' are apparently in need of

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<sup>188</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Los que están alentando que haya manifestaciones en Cuba no quieren para Cuba un bien de Salud, recuérdese que sus principios, su modelo, es el modelo neoliberal, es la privatización de los servicios, es la privatización de los servicios médicos, es la privatización de la educación, es que cada cual se salve como pueda; que puedan acudir a la Salud los que tengan dinero". Granma [author not mentioned], "Nosotros no Vamos a Entregar La Soberanía Ni La Independencia Del Pueblo, Ni La Libertad De Esta Nación," *Granma*, July 12, 2021, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-07-12>.

reaffirmation, for example the advantages of the existence of the one-party state. These articles seldomly have direct reference to any events or developments from the day before. This was not the case in *Granma* in the 1990s. When *Granma* contains more articles that are specifically aiming on legitimising an aspect of the revolution instead of reporting on events, the newspaper loses some of its 'newsworthy-ness' and becomes even more of a vehicle of the state's legitimisation than ever before.

Examples of these legitimising articles can be found throughout the post-Castro era, that are for instance titled: "Our party is unique"<sup>189</sup> or "Why we don't need more than one party"<sup>190</sup>. The last one explicitly argues why there is no need for more than one party. These articles seem to illustrate what aspects of the state are contested and thus in greater need of legitimisation; in these examples it is the one-party state. The party is portrayed as a unifying force for all the people and *Granma* seeks to discursively safeguard the sole existence of the party for the future: "The Communist Party of Cuba is unique because it is unique in its relationship with the people, because it exists by and for them, because it has been decisive in safeguarding its conquests in the most complex moments of the Revolution. Nothing related to the present and future of the Fatherland is alien to the Party"<sup>191</sup>. In these articles, claims are often made as if they are evidently true, or they are emphasised as evidently true. Considering the underlying social context and events in July 2021, it turns out that some of these claims are not self-evident. The quote above can serve an example. It is as if the state wants to reaffirm and safeguards truths discursively that were self-evident in former discourse.

Next to legitimising the one-party-state, there are other aspects of the Cuban state that are emphasised in the period surrounding the protests. The Cuban state has for example succeeded in developing their own COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. Thus, it is logical that in the post-Castro era the achievements that are highlighted in this period are mainly

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<sup>189</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Nuestro Partido Comunista es único". It is important to note that 'único' can be either be translated as 'unique' or as 'the only one'. Karima Oliva Bello, "Nuestro Partido Comunista Es Único," *Granma*, April 13, 2021, 3, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-04-13.1>.

<sup>190</sup> Originally in Spanish: " ¿Por qué no necesitamos más que un Partido?". Fidel Castro Ruz, "¿Por Qué no Necesitamos Más Que Un Partido?" *Granma*, May 13, 2021, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-05-13>.

<sup>191</sup> Originally in Spanish: "El Partido Comunista de Cuba es único porque única es su relación con el pueblo, porque existe por y para él, porque ha sido definitorio para salvaguardar sus conquistas en los momentos más complejos de la Revolución. Al Partido nada relacionado con el presente y futuro de la Patria le es ajeno". Leidys María Labrador Herrera, "De Un Congreso a Otro: El Compromiso Intacto Del Partido Con Su Pueblo," *Granma*, April 7, 2021, 4, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-04-07>.

in terms of Cuba's health care system: "Cuba is today a safe destination because of its peaceful citizens, the joy and hospitality of its people, and the guarantee offered by being a nation that has managed to control COVID-19, with its own vaccines"<sup>192</sup>. The quote demonstrates that next to Cuba's health care system, security is a legitimising factor domestically. It is described as the advantage to Cuba to attract tourism<sup>193</sup> for Cuba is described as a 'destination'. This makes sense in the light of a halt to tourism for 1.5 years due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Aspects like the development of vaccines and public safety in Cuba are omnipresent in Granma in the period surrounding the protest in very distinctive contexts; the development of the vaccines above is mentioned in the context of Cuba being a great destination for foreign tourists. The Cuban state does not miss an occasion to adhere to its legitimising achievements, which point to the Cuban state being in an increased need of domestical legitimisation.

### **3.4. Conclusion: Overlegitimisation**

This closing section of the last empirical chapter summarises and offers conclusions on the Cuban state discourse in Granma in the post-Castro era (2018-present). It also aims to offer a conclusion on the process of discursive legitimisation by introducing a novel concept within research on power and legitimacy.

An important, stable, and dominant source of legitimacy throughout Granma in the two periods are the *achievements of the revolution*, like free health care, free education, the socialist system providing basic goods and food, low infant mortality rates, life expectancy, high literacy rate and (social) security. There are some slight shifts in what specific achievements are highlighted. In the 1990's one of the main aspects of the revolution that was addressed was agricultural reform. This made sense in the light of Cuba trying to get out of a severe food crisis in that period. It highlighted the (former) achievements and recovery of the sector, possibly giving the Cuban people a perspective out of the food crisis. In the post-Castro era, there is less mention of agricultural reform.

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<sup>192</sup> Originally in Spanish: "Cuba es hoy un destino seguro por su tranquilidad ciudadana, por la alegría y hospitalidad de su pueblo, y por la garantía que ofrece ser una nación que ha logrado controlar la covid-19, con sus propias vacunas". Granma [author not mentioned], "Cuba Es Un Destino Seguro Y El Mundo Lo Reconoce," *Granma*, March 18, 2022, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2022-03-18>.

<sup>193</sup> Note that Granma is also published in English (in modified form). This Granma International appears weekly and collects the key articles from the Granma newspapers over the week.

Next to security, the achievement that is highlighted in the post-Castro era is health care, and then specifically that of developing its own vaccines against COVID-19, which is logical in times of a pandemic. I believe the that the shift in which achievements of the revolution are highlighted is mainly constituted by the underlying social events and context in the periods and that we can therefore not draw clear conclusions from it.

*History* is mobilised in the post-Castro era. There is often reference to the national hero José Martí and father of the fatherland Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. History is portrayed as continuity from two historical points. The first one is the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wherein Cuba fought its wars of independence, the other is the 1959 Revolution. Historical figures and shaping events are frequently addressed and remembered in *Granma*. These are events and figures that are seen to unite to Cuban people and form Cuban identity. Even though reference to the wars of independence is not explicitly done in communist terms i.e., is not addressed as a starting point of socialist ideals, the same terms are used to describe the fruits of both points in history, like 'freedom', 'independence' and 'patriotic'. The same goals were pursued, and the same moral valuations are present when referring to the Revolution as well as the wars of independence, without addressing the wars of independence as a predecessor or condition of possibility for the 1959 Revolution. In the post-Castro era, there is more reference to the Cuban Revolution and its continuity than in 1990s discourse. This makes sense in the light of the fact that the time after 2018 is historically more distant from the Revolution. It thus needs to be mobilised more to inform the younger generations. On the other hand, it is a sign that the continuity of the Revolution in the post-Castro era needs constant reaffirmation, where in the 1990s it seemed more self-evident and was less discursively expressed.

The phenomenon of *President* Fidel Castro rather speaking in *Granma* than being spoken about continues throughout the post-Castro era. This can be demonstrated by the fact that since Fidel passed away in 2016, there is a quote by him included in every issue of *Granma* at the down end of the front page. The quote is often selected to be related to the primary article in the issue. The quote seeks to unite morally and legitimise the project of the revolution by emphasising on the key achievements of the revolution<sup>194</sup>. There is an

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<sup>194</sup> See For Example: Fidel Castro Ruz, "Y Es Que La Revolución Pone Su Destino En Manos Del Pueblo (...), Pero La Defensa De La Revolución, La Defensa Fundamental De La Revolución Está En El Pueblo," *Granma*, November 30, 2020, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2020-11-30>, and Fidel Castro Ruz, "Un Partido Revolucionario En El Poder no Puede Apartarse De Los Principios Del Marxismo-Leninismo," *Granma*, April 13, 2021, 1, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-04-13>.

apparent need to refer to Fidel Castro, or quote him, to legitimise the revolution. Referencing to Fidel now might have a uniting function. It is as if the Cuban state needs the legitimacy of Fidel, who was evidently a primary source of legitimacy and constituent of Cuban culture and history. It is as if Cuba has lost part of its identity and needs to constantly reaffirm this identity of Fidel Castro to legitimise its power. It is simply as if the Cuban state is in a state of identity crisis, referencing back the aspects that have always united, defined and mobilised many Cubans. Another thing that stands out when it comes to the presidents speaking in *Granma*, is when the current president Miguel Díaz-Canel is quoted or paraphrased, he is said to 'ratify', 'reaffirm' or 'confirm' things. In articles describing speeches by the president or by other senior government officials in the 1990s, the terms 'declare', 'summarise', 'affirm' or 'say' were more commonly used. The terms used after 2018 give the impression that in the post-Castro era that there is a *reproduction* of truth instead of *production* of it i.e., that there is a truth out there already constructed that ought to be constantly reaffirmed and repeated. It also gives the impression that the ability to construct truth is only ascribed to Fidel Castro and not to the new president.

The *United States* is the enemy for Cuba, and then specifically the *US embargo*. This theme is omnipresent. The tone and form of describing the US in the post-Castro era has changed: it has gotten more aggressive. Words like 'terror'<sup>195</sup> and even 'genocide'<sup>196</sup> are now used to describe the US, certain institutions of the US like the CIA, or aspects of US policy like the blockade. With 'genocide' the US blockade is denoted. The Cuban state described the embargo as the longest genocide in history<sup>197</sup>. 1990s discourse surrounding the embargo was more diplomatic. You would read descriptions of the embargo as 'criminal' and 'unjust'. In the post-Castro era, the US embargo is addressed as the sole cause of all unrest and economic instability in Cuba. The 2021 protest were even said to be funded and organised by the US. This has excluded the protesters from the good project of the revolution. It also implies that there is no or limited domestic dissatisfaction. The tone towards the US got more aggressive and bittered and the US embargo is addressed in a variety of contexts. This emphasis stands out in post-Castro era Cuban state discourse. Many times, the US embargo is written between 2 commas in articles that do not

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<sup>195</sup> Wejibe, "La Otan," 6.

<sup>196</sup> See for example: (1) Díaz-Canel, "La Habana," 2, (2) Martínez, Borrego, Pérez, Suárez, Palomares, Febles, and Oliva, "Cubanos," 6, and (3) Ramos and Nusa, "A la Revolución," 2.

<sup>197</sup> Ríoseco, "El Bloqueo," 1.

necessarily cover the US embargo<sup>198</sup>, in the form of: ‘, because of the blockade’. It gives the impression that the US blockade is ‘added’ and that every opportunity is granted to mention the blockade. This addition of the US embargo in divergent contexts to constantly reaffirm that the cause of economic instability in Cuba is external implies its constant need of reaffirmation.

This also becomes clear in the discourse surrounding the 2021 protests, as the *protesters* were portrayed as ‘confused’ about the real causes of the economic situation in Cuba. The word ‘confused’ is interesting, and the 2021 protest was not the only context it was used in. It was also used to describe the San Isidro protesters a year before. In the post-Castro era only one cause of the protests and the economic situation in Cuba is addressed: the US embargo. Thus, apparently the protesters can be confused by other truths entering the public discourse. Thus, I believe that this description also reflects the entry of alternative discourses into the public discourse. Further, the word ‘confused’ gives the impression that the protesters are not completely and finally excluded from the Cuban state’s project, but there might be a possibility still is ‘unconfusing’ them i.e., winning them back for the state’s project. In 1990s discourse protesters were described with the word ‘unpatriotic’ as patriotism is a core aspect of the Revolution. They were thus fully excluded, and they were encouraged to leave Cuba and never return. The tone and form of the discourse was secure and confident. Describing protesters with ‘confused’ gives the impression of an insecure tone, especially when compared to the 1990s discourse. On the one hand we see more aggressive language towards the US, on the other more insecure language domestically. I do not believe this to be a contradicting development, but two sides of the same medal. The Cuban power feels contested and attacked. From this it may feel unconfident about the continuity of its legitimacy. Both aggressive and insecure language can be seen as examples of the state countering dissatisfaction and contestation.

Another observed development in the post-Castro era is that the state is using more argumentative language. I believe this also to be a result of the state feeling that its truths and legitimacy are attacked and contested. That an argument is made explicitly in favour of an ideology is a novelty in *Granma* in the post-Castro era. We have observed this in the

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<sup>198</sup> As found in: (1) Díaz-Canel, "La Habana," 2, (2) Susana Antón Rodríguez, "Servicio De Paquetería En Cuba: Que Sean Más Las Soluciones Que Los Problemas," *Granma*, May 13, 2021, 5, <https://www.granma.cu/impreso/2021-05-13>, (3) Oliva, "Hagámosles," 8.

article promoting socialism over capitalism<sup>199</sup>. Evidently, arguments are made throughout the state's discourse and in the 1990s. You could say any legitimising claim contains an argument. It is however novel that it happens explicitly and that an article is structured like an argument. This gives the impression that socialism is contested or under attack. Before, the continuity of socialism and thus socialism itself appeared to be a sufficient source of legitimacy. It gives the impression that the truth that socialism is good and uncontested is less self-evident as before or even contested. That socialism is regarded as under attack reflects the entry of alternative discourses contesting the dominant one.

I believe that the tone and form of the post-Castro era discourse resemble insecurities, because things are constantly reaffirmed that apparently did not need the same amount of reaffirmation in the 1990s discourse. The discourse seems to be in great need legitimisation considering the aggressive and insecure tone of the discourse, the increase in legitimising articles, the description of the US Embargo as causing instability in Cuba in a more aggressive way and the appearance of structured arguments in favour of the state's ideology. Power always needs to be legitimised<sup>200</sup>, as we have seen the same phenomenon in the 1990s discourse. However, the omnipresence of legitimising claims in the post-Castro era points to a greater need of legitimisation. The tone and form of legitimising claims can give an indication of the stability of the process of discursive legitimisation. I believe that the insecurities, aggression, argumentative language, and the clinging to former more self-evident legitimising claims can be best described with the concept that I have developed called 'Overlegitimisation'. In the case of the Cuban state discourse, the concept can be described as that *(1) the state is feeling contested by the growing emergence of alternative discourses and social dissatisfaction. (2) To counter this, the state is clinging desperately to its older discourse, and is trying to push this through more forcefully, (3) for example by using more aggressive and argumentative language and by the endless repetition of legitimising claims.*

A dominant discourse can lose its coherency by the availability of alternative discourses<sup>201</sup>. It must be noted that it is not hard to imagine how a discourse can lose its coherency by the availability of alternative discourses by the late rise of availability of

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<sup>199</sup> Prieto, "Los Misioneros," 4.

<sup>200</sup> Ruibal, "Legitimacy", 1.

<sup>201</sup> McLeod, "Colonial Discourses," 67. See also: Henken and van de Voort. "From Nada," 341-350.

internet in Cuba and this alternative information. Only since 2019 it was possible to have data (3G) on a mobile phone. 'Already' in 2020 social media was used to a great extent to mobilise people, for example during the 2020 San Isidro protest and the 2021 major protests.

There are many signs in the Cuban state discourse since 2018 of that the state power is in distress, that aspects of it are contested and that the Cuban state feels a great need of justifying its project, policies, and ideology. I believe that the phenomenon that I have described as 'overlegitimisation' can contribute to the state's power getting even more in distress (i.e., the process of discursive legitimisation to destabilise) when there is discrepancy between the discursive content of the claims and the social context, wherein they gain their meaning, and an increase of the availability of alternative discourses.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have studied how the Cuban state discursively legitimises its power through the state-run newspaper 'Granma'. More specifically, I have analysed how the Cuban state legitimises its position in times of social crisis. I have studied two distinct periods of social upheaval in Cuba: the 'special period' (1991-1999) and the post-Castro period (2018-present). Below, I provide an overview of dominant state discourses in Granma during both periods. The discourse analysis I have formed around 5 dominant themes (history, Fidel Castro/presidency, protest/dissidence, the US (embargo) and the achievements of the revolution) to see if there are significant discursive shifts, similarities, and differences.

Analysing these differences is meaningful since more recent discursive efforts of the Cuban state have not been studied yet, even though significant changes have taken place in recent years (e.g., a transition of power and the emergence of digital communication via social media). Studying Cuban state discourse considering these changes can highlight how the position of the Cuban state has evolved since the end of the Cold War period. In this conclusion I summarise my observations and test the theoretical framework.

### 4.1. Similarities and Differences

Even though the differences in the discourse between the two periods are highlighted throughout this research, the similarities cannot be overlooked. When it comes to the content of the discourse, the truths it produces, and specifically the legitimising claims, the Cuban state discourses in the 1990s and after 2018 are very similar. Both periods mainly hold the same moral judgements (what is considered good and bad). The discourse predominantly creates the same dichotomies and is constructed by the same logical scheme. Generally, we have called the Cuban state discourse the revolutionary discourse, because it is characterised by militant language. Examples of this are terms like 'battle', 'struggle', 'defend', 'threat', 'fight' and 'honour', and phrases like 'Socialismo o muerte' (socialism or death) and 'Patria o muerte' (fatherland or death).

The same legitimising claims are present in both periods, two of which most present are that the enemy United States, and specifically the US blockade, is responsible for all economic misery in Cuba and that the Cuban revolution itself has achieved great things. In both time periods Fidel Castro is used as a source of legitimacy, but this is increasingly true

for the post-Castro era. It gives the impression that Cuba needs Fidel to legitimise the continuation of the revolution. Further, in both time periods history is mobilised to create unity and shared identity (nationalism). The main historical period that is mobilised in the 1990s is the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wherein Cuba fought its wars of Independence. In the post-Castro era, the Revolution is mobilised more often. This gives the impression that the revolution is in greater need of legitimisation now than in the 1990s.

An interesting continuation that we have seen in the post-Castro era throughout *Granma* is that (nearly) every public speech of Cuba's president is fully published in *Granma*. This was true for Fidel Castro's speeches as well as speeches by Miguel Díaz-Canel. Interesting is that in the post-Castro era the president is always said to 'ratify', 'reaffirm' or 'confirm' things. In the 1990s discourse articles describing speeches by the presidents the terms 'declared', 'summarised' or 'said' were more commonly used. These terms used more often after 2018 give the impression that in the post-Castro era that there is a *reproduction* of truth instead of *production* of it i.e., that there is a truth out there already constructed that ought to be constantly reaffirmed and that there is an increasing need of the reaffirmation of truths that were always more self-evident in Cuban state discourse.

That there is terminology used in the 1990s that rather denote the construction of truth does make sense in the light of the fact that Cuba had to reinvest some aspects of its ideology and state when losing ideological reference to the Soviet Union. That the terminology used in the post-Castro era rather denotes a continuation of what has already been constructed is logical because the new president was explicit about not going to do things very differently than his predecessors exemplified by the 2019 Constitution that was rather a ratification of what was already there instead of a new constitution. It also constitutionalised the future of Cuba's socialism and one-party state. What becomes clear, is that post-Castro era discourse consists of a frequent repetition of claims/constructed truths that were already there. The use of these words that refer to the reproduction instead of the production of truth contribute to the impression that the state's legitimacy in the post-Castro era is more contested, pointing towards the power being in distress.

The difference in terms describing the president's speeches is not the only thing that led to the conclusion of 'overlegitimisation', described as a repetition of legitimising claims in an aggressive and insecure tone. There is other evidence in the fact that in the post-Castro era the state discourse has become more aggressive and insecure. The aggression is best illustrated using words like 'genocide' to describe the US embargo and

'terrorism' to describe certain US institutions like the CIA. Not only in the description of the US there is an aggressive tone visible in the post-Castro era, but also when it comes to describing protesters. On the one hand they were described as traitors that were in supports of Cuba's enemy Donald Trump. On the other, they were said to be 'confused'. I have interpreted this as an insecure tone that not fully excludes the protesters from the state's project. From it speaks a possibility of 'unconfusing' them i.e., winning them back for the state's project. It also reflects the existence of alternative discourses. I do not see and aggressive and insecure tone as contradicting but have described them as being two sides of the same medal. The Cuban power feels contested and attacked. From this it may feel unconfident about the continuity of its legitimacy. Both aggressive and insecure language can be seen as examples of the state countering dissatisfaction and contestation.

#### **4.2 Implications and Theory**

That the effects of discourse can be both productive and reproductive was already described by Foucault, who stated that discourse reflects and forms power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices<sup>202</sup>, but that these power relations are never completely stable but need constant reaffirmation<sup>203</sup>. The described vocabulary serves as an adequate example: the state needs to reaffirm the truths of its discourse constantly to establish a relative equilibrium in identities and moral valuations that are in support of their project and thus of acceptance and recognition of power<sup>204</sup>. A complete stability will, in line with the idea of the inherent instability of power and the observations on the Cuban state discourse, never be reached. That in repressive<sup>205</sup> states official state discourse is therefore mainly a sheer repetition of claims/constructed truths, which is part of the introduced concept of 'overlegitimisation' is also confirmed by Eric Heinze, who states that "in repressive states, public discourse often amounts to little more than endless

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<sup>202</sup> Hörnqvist, *Risk*, Abstract.

<sup>203</sup> Clegg, "Foucault," 29.

<sup>204</sup> 'A form of power grounded in acceptance and recognition of authority' is the definition we have used for legitimacy See: Ruibal, "Legitimacy", 1.

<sup>205</sup> There can be discussion whether Cuba is in fact a repressive state. But when replacing 'repressive' with 'authoritarian' the phrase contains its same meaning, because what is important in this context is the influence of state discourse on public discourse, which is present to a greater extend in 'authoritarian' state due to the small distance between state and public as well as monopolies over the production and reproduction of information and with that the absence of alternative discourses.

reiteration of state-approved message”<sup>206</sup>. This is also in line with what Foucault observed on state discourse. Discourse for Foucault is not necessarily state power. Discourse is the domain of the production and circulation of rule-governed statements<sup>207</sup> and therefore of power. It is evident that in more authoritarian states, the rules that govern statements and truth are more easily and more directly constructed by the state. Hence, that part of the definition of ‘overlegitimisation’ is not only confirmed by the analysis of the primary source, but also by theory on state discourse and power. Heinze’s observation that in repressive states the public discourse consist of the repetition of state approved messages is also supported by Port’s research, as he calls it the hegemony of the state discourse in Cuba i.e., the Cuban state discourse a hegemonic discourse<sup>208</sup>. The constant reaffirmation of truths, identities and moral valuations that are in support of the state’s project, Port would call the process or retaining hegemony in the field of meaning.

That a power is inherently unstable seems to contradict my earlier conclusion on the Cuban state discourse in the ‘special period’, where I stated that the Cuban state power was still ‘A Stable Power’. When I stated that the Cuban state power in the 1990s was still stable, I have not intended to conclude anything on the inherent instability of power constantly needing reaffirmation. What I concluded on the 1990s discourse, was that there was little evidence to be found that the process of discursive legitimisation was problematic. That the Cuban state power was still ‘stable’ and uncontested was also what Port concluded in his research comparing Cuban state’s 1980s and 1990s discourse, as he stated that by discursively interpreting the crisis “as the result of incompetent US policies..., instead of the island internal problems. This implies that the system retained all its legitimacy”<sup>209</sup>.

That there are no signs within the discourse of distress and problematic legitimacy can however not be said for the Cuban state discourse post-Castro era. Contrary to the great similarities in discourse when it comes to the content of the (legitimising) claims,

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<sup>206</sup> Eric Heinze, "Beyond 'memory Laws': Towards a General Theory of Law and Historical Discourse," *Forthcoming in Law and Memory: Addressing Historical Injustice by Law (U.Belavusau & A.Gliszczyńska-Grabias, Eds., Cambridge University Press)*, Queen Mary School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper no. 235 (2016): 421.

<sup>207</sup> Mills, "Introduction," 14-15

<sup>208</sup> Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 157.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 133.

there are fundamental differences in the form and the tone<sup>210</sup> that the discourse takes between the two analysed time periods. Where the tone of the discourse in the 1990's was still hopeful and positive. The *tone* of the discourse after 2018 has become more bitter, negative, insecure, and even aggressive. When it comes to the *form* the discourse takes, there is more repetition of legitimising claims that often do not correspond to the events the day before. The 1990's *Granma* was more newsworthy in reporting on events. After 2018, there is a primacy of legitimising articles that do not or only indirectly report on events. Apparently, the state is in more need of legitimisation, which can be caused by the appearance of alternative (contesting) discourses and the disappearance of the primary source of legitimacy: Fidel Castro. The tone of the discourse in the post-Castro era often resembles insecurities. Often claims are made as if they are evidently true (for example: "Cuba does not need more than one political party"<sup>211</sup>). Apparently, these are contested. It is as if the state wants to affirm and reconfirm certain facts that were self-evident in former discourse. Thus, the aggressive and insecure as well as the repetition of legitimising claims are both evidence for the state being more in distress.

Port claims that there was hegemony for the state to form meaning in Cuba within public discourse in the 1980s as well as in the 1990s. I notice a significant difference between the 1990s and the post-Castro era, namely the availability of *alternative discourses*. The availability of alternative discourses can influence the hegemony of a dominant discourse because an alternative discourse can contest and challenge the truths of a dominant discourse. Alternative discourses negotiate the dominant discourse and have the possibility to even replace a dominant discourse. I believe the entry of alternative discourses can be best described as causing a blow to the coherency, consistency and internal logics of a discourse and can thus contribute to destabilising the process of

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<sup>210</sup> Interesting is that Port also observed this in his research. He observed that 1980s Cuban state discourse was more aggressive (as he speaks of less insulting language in the 1990s than in the 1980s). He did however not conclude that this insulting language in the 1980s was a sign of the state's legitimacy being in distress, but he concluded that the discourse was less insulting/aggressive in the 1990s, possibly due to the new unfavourable position in global politics in which the island lacked the military-strategic backing of the USSR. In short, in the 1980s the Cuban state dared to use more offense language towards the US, because they were protected by the USSR. That insulting and aggressive language in the 1980s is not a sign that the state legitimacy is in distress, but that it can be after 2018 is a plausible conclusion when keeping in mind the difference in social context (the 1980s was anything but a period of crisis) and the combination with the increase of legitimising claims in the post-Castro era. Lukas Port, "*Hegemonic Discourse*," 122.

<sup>211</sup> Castro, "¿Por Qué," 1.

discursive legitimisation. This may be especially true for Cuba because Cubans did not have the access to alternative discourses for a long time.

The effect of alternative discourses on a dominant discourses is described by McLeod's, who observed that dominant discourses are problematic because they will always encounter alternatives. The alternative views can throw the authority of the dominant discourse into question<sup>212</sup>. That there is a significant increase of dominant discourses in Cuba in the post Castro-era is not hard to imagine because only in 2019 it was possible for the first time to have internet access with data (3G) on a mobile phone. That Cuba has long been the most restricted country in Latin America regarding Internet freedom for its citizens, has long constituted the possibility of having a homogenous, as argued by for example Omar Granados<sup>213</sup>. Nowadays, the internet is getting less restricted in Cuba, and/or Cuban people find their way around the restriction and censorship with for example VPN connections.

Whereas Port studied the Cuban state discourse in terms of legitimacy and hegemony (over meaning), Granados analyses the Cuban discourse in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity. It is important to bear in mind that Port's research, like this one, is merely conducted towards the Cuban *state* discourse. Granados' research is conducted on the public discourse and on what discourses influence this public discourse. In Granados research 'heterogeneity' would mean the existence of alternative discourses next to the Cuban state discourse in Cuban public discourse and 'homogeneity' would mean that the Cuban public discourse solely exists of the Cuban state discourse, what Port would describe as hegemonic.

Granados further concludes that it is now, through the wide availability of internet, that not only the state's discourse can influence the public discourse, as he states that the internet is getting less restricted, giving rise to cultural heterogeneity. Even though my research is directed towards the state discourse, this conclusion is of great importance, because when alternative discourses can contest the dominant discourse, which is in this instance the Cuba state discourse, it can cause harm to the legitimacy of the Cuban state discourse, which touches upon the core of this research. The aggressive and insecure tone of the Cuban state in the post-Castro era serves as a possible indication that the Cuban

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<sup>212</sup> McLeod, "Colonial Discourses," 67. See also: Henken and van de Voort. "From Nada," 344.

<sup>213</sup> Granados, "Voces Cubanadas," 176.

state feels contested by the growing emergence of alternative discourses. Alternative discourses have the potential to challenge even the most central and dominant truths of a dominant discourse: "...potential of recent Cuban independent cyberactivism and to demonstrate the central role its discourse of cultural heterogeneity has played as the seed for a new civil society for Cubans. The work of Cuban-based independent cyberactivists has dismantled Raúl Castro's government positioning over the fabricated notion of Cubanía (that is, Cuban national identity as an intrinsic element of socialism)"<sup>214</sup>. Granados here demonstrates that alternative discourse in the form of cyberactivism has the potential to even challenge truths that are most centric to the state's discourse, here in the form of Cuba's national identity as being intrinsically socialist. He adds that the use of internet has not only given Cuba a new source of information and a gateway to other discourses, but it had also given Cubans a platform, that has for example been used to mobilise others across the country on the day of the 2021 protests. It can also be used as a platform to become more visible and active internationally.

Not only theoretically and due to the social context, but there is also evidence found in Granma itself that in the post-Castro era there is a space (but no room<sup>215</sup>) for other truths. This became clear in the article reflection on a group that preached capitalism as the solution for Cuba's problems. The argument is said to be made against "missionaries who preach the restauration of capitalism in Cuba"<sup>216</sup>. The discourse reflects that there is apparent space for other 'truths' within the Cuban state discourse, namely that of another moral appreciation of capitalism. The Cuban state seeks to attack these truths. This could be a sign that the Cuban state is losing its complete hegemony over the construction of truth, as there are serious contesters now.

In this thesis I intended to ask the question of *how the Cuban state has legitimised its power discursively through its official newspaper Granma in two periods of instability: the 'special period' (1991-1999) and the post-Castro era (2018-present-)*? A clear answer is that in the post-Castro era, contrary to the 'special period' the Cuban state has 'overlegitimised' its power. I have introduced this novel concept to describe the phenomenon of the apparent problems in the process of the discursive legitimisation of

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<sup>214</sup> Granados, "Voces Cubanas," 176.

<sup>215</sup> There are spaces opening in the Cuba state public discourse for alternative discourses by the access to social media. However, the state does not want to provide 'room' for these contesting discourses and attacks these discourses implicitly and explicitly in Granma.

<sup>216</sup> Prieto, "Los Misioneros," 4.

power by the Cuban state and in this specific case, I defined it as (1) *the state is feeling contested by the growing emergence of alternative discourses and social dissatisfaction*. (2) *To counter this, the state is clinging desperately to its older discourse, and is trying to push this through more forcefully*, (3) *for example by using more aggressive and argumentative language and by the endless repetition of legitimising claims*.

A strong intuition, with evidence in underlying course of events in the post-Castro era, is that the process of 'overlegitimisation' has a destabilising effect overtime. However, this would requiring additional research in the effect as well as the reception of discourse. What I have found is that there is a growing discrepancy in the post-Castro era between the discursive content of the legitimising claims and the social context wherein they gain their meaning. An example is implementing laws that move away from socialism but legitimising the state's project as a continuation of socialism. Besides, the post-Castro era discourse is showing inconsistencies as illustrated by the Cuban state's claim that the dialogue is one of the pillars of the revolution – that there should be a battle of ideas<sup>217</sup> – but other perspectives or ideas are excluded from the dialogue as a precaution, as we have seen with the San Isidro Movement standing up for the freedom of speech and artistic expression. These inconsistencies and this discrepancy can both have a destabilising effect.

Finally, with Port I agreed that in the 1990s there was no or little sign of alternative discourses contesting the dominant one and causing a blow to its legitimacy<sup>218</sup>, neither were there signs in the discourse itself that the power was in distress. These signs are present in the post-Castro era by the tone of the discourse that got more aggressive, the repetition of legitimising claims and the form of the discourse making specific arguments in favour of its ideology and legitimising claims without reference to newsworthy events. There are clear signs in the Cuban state discourse itself that the legitimacy of the state is in distress. From the described social context throughout this research also has also become clear that the Cuban power is contested and may reach a point of untenable instability soon in terms of its effectiveness of discursively legitimising its power. Signs that the long dominant revolutionary truths are losing dominance and coherency or omnipresent in the Cuban state discourse itself as from the post-Castro era Cuban state discourse a speaks a

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<sup>217</sup> Bernard, "Patria o Muerte," 1.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., Abstract.

<sup>218</sup> Lukas Port, "Hegemonic Discourse," 133.

great need of legitimisation and justification. Thus, I would say the Cuban state discourse does not have a hegemonic status anymore now but is still dominant.

#### **4.2. Suggestions for Further Research**

To possibly come to a more general definition of 'overlegitimisation' that is applicable in multiple contexts, more research is required. This research can be conducted towards other state's discourses that may be in distress to see if the same phenomenon is present in the discourse of other states, that are for example going through periods of crisis and contestation. These do not necessarily have to be authoritarian states, as I believe that the process of discursive legitimisation is present in every form and degree of power.

Myself, I am eager to conduct more research on the reception and function of the Cuban state discourse to see what the effect of the phenomenon of 'overlegitimisation' can be. This can for instance be done by interviewing recipients in Cuba of its state's discourse and ask them what truths and claims for them are self-evident or doubtful. This could provide insight into the effects of the repetition of legitimising claims, that can be distant from the social context the recipients live in.

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## Appendix A: Model for Discourse Analysis

Question per issue:

1. What does the front-page cover?
2. What is seen as the most important 'event' the day before?
3. What is the daily quote at the bottom of the front page and who is quoted?

Question per article?

1. What is the title of the article and what message does it send?
2. What does the article cover?
3. What seems to be the goal of the article?
4. Is there an argument made or is it descriptive?
5. What is implicitly or explicitly said about the Cuban state?
6. Are one of the following dominant themes present? If yes, how are they discursively expressed?
  - Continuation and achievements of the Revolution.
  - Fidel Castro/presidency.
  - The US and the US blockade.
  - History.
  - Protest/dissidence.
7. What moral claims are made? What concepts or entities relate to either 'good' or 'bad'?
8. What is left out that you would expect?

## Appendix B: Chronological overview of key events (1991-1999)

*December 26, 1991:* Dissolution of the Soviet Union (and Comecon). Cuba loses its trade partners and the financial aid of the Soviet Union.

*October 23, 1992:* The Torricelli Act becomes effective, a US bill that tightens the US embargo on Cuba preventing other nations to aid or trade with Cuba, while Cuba itself is opening to foreign direct investment (FDI).

*August 6, 1994:* 'El Maleconazo': a protest of hundreds of Cubans on the Malecon, mainly demanding the freedom to leave Cuba. As a result, Fidel Castro changes the state's emigration laws.

*April to Oct 1994:* 'The Balsero Crisis': an exodus of over 35,000 Cubans overseas to the US in response to Fidel Castro changing emigration laws.

*1994:* Cuban Ministry of tourism created. The Cuban state starts to invest heavily in tourist facilities as they seek a new source of income in need of foreign currency.

*1994:* A second currency, the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC), is introduced, pegged 1:1 to the USD. In 2004 the USD ceases to be accepted.

*1995:* The Wet feet, dry feet policy introduced. The US policy implies that anyone migrating from Cuba to the US will be allowed residency.

*March 12, 1996:* The Helms-Burton Act is passed. This US law strengthens the embargo against Cuba sanctioning foreign companies when trading with Cuba.

*February 2, 1999:* Hugo Chavez becomes Venezuela's vice president. An alliance with Cuba and Fidel Castro is quickly formed. Venezuela becomes Cuba's new partner in trade and ideology. Venezuelan aid to Cuba contributed to overcoming the 'special period'.

*November 1999* The international diplomatic conflict about the repatriation of the young Cuban boy Elián González.

## Appendix C: Chronological overview of key events (2018-2022)

*April 19, 2018:* Raúl Castro steps down as president of the Council of State. The Castro era *de jure* ends. Miguel Díaz-Canel takes over as president.

*February 24, 2019:* A new constitution is approved by 90.15% of voters. It aims on the continuation of socialism and distribution of political power on top.

*April 8, 2019:* A protest of hundreds of activists marching in Cuba against animal abuse. The first independent march authorized by the Cuba state.

*June 4, 2019:* Trump tightens the embargo preventing cruises to moor in Havana. A blow to Cuba's tourism, its largest source of income.

*November 15, 2019:* Havana celebrates its 500 years anniversary, accompanied by upheaval: citizens stop government officials capturing stray dogs.

*November 17, 2020:* The San Isidro Movement, a group of artists and dissidents, go into a hunger strike to evoke a dialogue with the Cuban government. Some hundred supporters sit outside the Ministry of Culture.

*January 1, 2021:* Monetary unification and a reduction in subsidized goods. The monetary unification would cause inflation.

*January 12, 2021:* Trump puts Cuba on the official 'State Sponsors of Terrorism' list, causing banks worldwide preventing transactions with Cuba.

*January 20, 2021:* Biden takes over as US President. Many expect that Biden will improve diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba.

*April 19, 2021:* Raúl Castro steps down as the leader of the Communist Party (PCC). Miguel Díaz-Canel takes over.

*July 11, 2021:* Thousands of Cubans took to the streets in the largest protest since its 1959 Revolution. The protests were triggered by a shortage of food and medicine and by discontent with the government.

*November 15, 2021:* Planned organized protests for democracy and freedom of expression have been snuffed out by Cuban authorities, that ran a media campaign stating that the protests were organised by the US.

*November 15, 2021:* Cuba reopens to tourism after closing its borders due to COVID-19.